University of Alberta

Hotfooting Around Essentialism: Feminisms of Colour

by

Mridula Nath Chakraborty ©

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This dissertation is for Daphne Read

for that remarkable and rare gift:

the freedom to think

Abstract

"Hotfooting Around Essentialism: Feminisms of Colour" is an analysis of the strategic essentialisms effected by four postcolonial feminists in the contemporary Anglo-North-American academy: Himani Bannerji, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Sherene H Razack and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The years 1980-2000 are marked by intense debates in hegemonic Anglo-American feminist theory on the issue of sexual differentiation as *the* determining factor of feminist experience, method, knowledge and practice. Racialised feminists from the constituencies of Black and postcolonial feminisms and feminisms of colour oppose gendered essentialism on the grounds of their differential locations and oppositional histories of consciousness. In the displaced, diasporic space of white-settler colonies, scholars from the third world are invited to and interpellated by the identity politics of women of colour, even as their own class-status in their nations of origin, combined with a classical colonial education, mitigates against their occupation of the place of the silenced and the marginalised in the knowledge hierarchy of the academy. As postcolonial scholars with substantial histories of their own, they arrive in the metropolitan academy as outsiders to its institutional politics but very much as insiders to its epistemological structures. Postcolonial theorists are thus marked by their origins, both in the geo-political three-worlds schema as well as in their negotiated speaking place in feminism. Here, they *perform* the paradox of diversity and *enact* the profound confusion between the public and the private that has characterised our times since the personal became the political.

P

Walking along the razor's edge of a constructed chromatic hierarchy in the multicultural nations of Anglo-North America, my primary theorists constantly *hotfoot* between self-identified and state-imposed selves, between their essence and experience, embodiment and ethics, hyphenation and hybridity, authenticity and appropriation, and between being native informants and subalterns for the feminist nation. I propose that this methodology provides postcolonial feminists with a powerful way of rethinking identity, through a *hotfooting around essentialism* that takes into account the intimate correlation between originary physical/psychic places and the processes of arrival in othered spaces. The red thread running through this study is the simultaneously claimed and contested site of South Asian /Indian identity for all four of my primary feminists.

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This dissertation is for Daphne Read. It would simply not be possible without her. I came to this work because of a half-year section I took with her, part of a modular, team-taught, year-long course on "Public Feminisms" in my first year of arrival in Edmonton, Canada from New Delhi, India. Most of my preliminary readings in feminisms of color, the ones that have stayed with me the longest, were part of the module she taught. Daphne: you allowed me the luxury of time to swim and navigate my own exciting way through the work produced here. During the inordinately and unthinkably long time it has taken me to complete this dissertation, you have been my most wonderfully patient, permissive and persuasive interlocutor. If ever the injunction went out in Anglo-North American feminist scholarship about *listening*, this is where it got delivered. I have had the incredible good fortune of being heard, of receiving meticulous feedback, of being challenged on the circuitousness of my thinking, in the gentlest, most generous ways possible. But this tribute to you would not be possible without mentioning how *exacting* your appraisal of my work has been. You raised the standards of scholarship for me without ever being didactic about it: it is in the *quality* and *sensitivity* of your engagement with my work that I have been blessed. Most of all, you taught me how to be in the world, in the institution as a scholar and as a teacher, and as a human being. Your ability to be present, to not judge, to be curious, to provide a holding place while facilitating my difficult journey of self-discovery, has truly been an embarrassment of riches! Thank you.

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Preface

As usual, an autobiographical preface as the *raison d' être* of this work... just longer. A year into my arrival at the University of Alberta to pursue doctoral work on translation publishing houses in India, I was called, unexpectedly, in a different direction. At the end of a year-long modular course on "Public Feminisms," I found myself engaging in what is widely known as 'feminisms of colour' in Anglo-North America. Experiencing a kind of silencing in the first half of this course, I suddenly 'discovered' my 'lost' voice in the second term when I was introduced to Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*[1]. Soon afterwards, I presented a working paper at the graduate student forum in this department, "The Native Informant: Hotfooting Around Essentialism!" I quote from my opening paragraph:

> The paper I am going to present is not about my work. Not my work in the sense that papers presented at the Public Works forum have been, so far, about the timely ongoing progress of graduate students at various stages in their doctoral programme. As I tried over the last few weeks to work and rework my presentation, trying on flippant and funky notes and then serious and savvy ones, I realised that each draft was in some way speaking to the process of being here in Canada: a) as an international student, b) as a third world woman on a scholarship, c) as a brown-skinned person and d) as a woman-of-colour feminist. I arrived in Canada knowing myself to be the first two, turned into the third category at the port of entry point, Canada Customs, in Vancouver, found Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa shortly after being in Edmonton and converted to the last category.

As prefatory remarks go, these are altogether familiar and predictable ones, necessary if only to point out their frequency of their iteration[2].

The next eight years were spent quite productively in the study of feminisms of colour and had I stopped there, I would have lived happily, or unhappily, ever after, as an avowed and card-carrying woman of color. Soon however, given my incipient training in postcolonial studies at Delhi University, India, I also began following the work of the Holy Triumvirate, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, with some diligence. Bhabha and Said did not stay on for long, but Spivak pitched her tent in my study for a long long time, refusing to leave. In addition, I found myself actively seeking and perusing the work of other postcolonial feminists, who were also often interpellated as and invited to occupy the space of feminists of color. Here I noticed something curious: contrary to the oft-repeated and vociferous assertions that all women of colour are ignored, silenced, marginalised and discriminated against in mainstream, dominant 'Western' academy, the women from the Indian subcontinent seemed to be doing (in)famously well. The postcolonial scholars whose names I recognised and catalogued as subcontinental did not only seem to flourish, but were given credence, celebrated and prolifically cited in the Anglo-North American feminist publishing industry. At the same time, Chicana feminist Norma Alarçon maintained about women of colour that institutions are "happy to take her text but not her, except as a seasonal worker" (75). She offered an "academic allegory of/for Chicana critics" in which "the 'new' feminist 'identity politics' of women of color forged through a 'politics of cultural difference'" were deeply implicated in the institutional "narratives that support the national(istic) *status quo*" of white-settler states (65, 70, 66). By the same token, the newly racialised[3] and *nationalised* postcolonial scholar who claimed a politics of solidarity and 'common context of struggle' with the woman of colour[4], also became the "paradigmatic woman of multiple incarnations" in her "dislocation" at the site of national and feminist culture (Alarçon 67). In her case, this speaking position was a particularly articulated and advantageous one.

This dissertation is about the production as well as dislocation of this paradigmatic woman who has been designated the subaltern voice in contemporary theory. The "fabulous construction" of such a woman takes place "in the locus of '*la différend*,' the site of conflict, collision or contest" towards "anything that presupposes for its interpretation an inherent monological rationality" (Alarçon 67). Alarçon establishes a "tenuous connection between women working in the actual border shops ['sweat shops' in the political economy of the metropolis/*maquiladoras*] who put their lives at risk, and Chicana critics who work an interstitial zone which is constantly on the move given its structural displacements within the academy" (67). Spivak, postcolonial critic *par excellence*, offers a parallel example of "the emergent postcolonial" who, sharing in the "philosophical pre-suppositions, historical excavations, and literary representations of the dominant," nevertheless lays down the trail for the "subliminal and discontinuous emergence of the 'native informant': autochthone and/or subaltern" within theory (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* xi). In her analysis, "the typecase of the foreclosed native informant today is the *poorest* woman of the South" (*CPR* 6). Given that I had begun to self-identify as a 'woman of colour' and was at the same time starting to be invested in my 'postcoloniality' as an 'Indian' scholar, I found myself caught *possessing* knowledge (like contraband undetected at the border), primed for the task of native informancy, and at the same time affiliating with the rhetoric of a *lack* of power. I was plonked in the site of academic valourisation as someone who could *speak to* the racialised body of the postcolonial Other woman from the vantage point of *authentic* origin and experience, as the native informant. Further, this happened not so much in the space of postcolonial studies but within the feminist community to which I was increasingly trying to correlate. This ironic divide between knowledge politics and a bodily identity posed an ethical dilemma that I seem to have intuited, however clumsily, even at the time of that first paper (a dilemma familiar to many other postcolonial theorists):

> As I write myself into the great American academic debate, I am aware, due to, and with Spivak, that I "strategically" occupy the position of the "self-marginalising or self-consolidating migrant or postcolonial masquerading as a 'native informant.'" Academically speaking, it is the moment of arrival for the so-called subaltern in postcolonial studies, who is speaking as she has never spoken before, and that raises important questions of identity for me. Am I that woman?[5] (Chakraborty)

That question became the launching point for this dissertation, as I found myself answering it with a 'yes' as well as 'but no'. Debates around native informancy in Anglo North American academe are clustered around the Other, who increasingly is a racialised alien or permanent resident but not legitimate enough citizen in the nation. I joked for a long time that I had become a woman of colour at Vancouver airport, but in retrospect, I have to assert that I became a woman of colour in that first feminist classroom. It was only later that the intimate connection between the two, the racial or national border and the feminist boundary, revealed itself to me.

Each time I have come in and gone out of Canada, I have slipped in and out of its colouring box, escaping what Spivak critiques as "racial discrimination based on chromatism" which has "something of a hold on the official philosophy of US anti-racist feminism" ("Imperialism and Sexual Difference" 235). The label and self-identity of 'woman of colour' has shifted and my racialised lens have blurred when I am not present on this soil where race seems to be the predominant identifying or mobilising factor for politics. I have started to think of myself as essentially 'Indian' outside India, although *in* India, I would never describe myself as such; I *became* Indian only after leaving its subcontinental, geographical bounds. My linguistic community would be more important for purposes of social identification there and my intellectual and professional circles would be defined by my various politics or cultural interests. In Canada, even as I took up an anti-racist position using the label 'woman of colour' (to cope with the fallout of an alienating diasporic experience), I did not embrace this to be my affective identity. This hopping on and off nomenclatural labels and politicised stands has led me to question the *primacy of race* (understood in settler nation terms) as the defining sense of selfhood for migrant feminists who claim, however contestingly, an origin in or a sense of belonging to other, more or equally significant, affective sites of being.

I began to perceive the idea of race to be intimately connected with the modern nation state. In this, I found many diasporic, subcontinental Indian scholars[6] exploring the same issues that I was confronted with. So much so that I started to selectively, sometimes self-indulgently, read the work of any theorist who sounded or seemed subcontinental! This was an unabashedly essentialised way of doing research, based on the mythical concept of a subcontinental essence or its North American avatar, South Asianness. I was impelled no doubt also by a somewhat shamefaced pride that I could lay claim to such an impressive legacy of scholarship. I found that these theorists seemed to have not only the platform to speak on new, contemporary issues of travel, migrancy, dislocation, disarticulation and disruption, but also traditional, classical, continuous disciplinary spaces. In fact, they commanded substantial citational power in the Anglophone academy at large — this includes any place where the English language is the medium of scholarship, in all its literary and theoretical complexity.

Citational power I would define as the power to be quoted, to be held up as an authority, to be perceived as having access to received *and* revisionist specialised knowledges and valued access to its dissemination. Even as I construct this self-congratulatory, personalised narrative of the position subcontinental scholars of all possible hues and affiliations (to a nation, religion, region, language, ethnicity, politics, sexuality) occupy in the burgeoning Anglophone academy, I do not lose sight of the historical struggle they have undergone to reach this point. I do not deny any of the institutional obstacles they have had to clear, and competitive, ideological and epistemological constraints they have had to break through. I do not disavow the clearly important conversations and contestations they had in those common contexts of struggle with women and feminists of colour. But, the academy that I have come into and inherited proliferates with subcontinental Indian/South Asian names. This statistic (that last resort of the person making a contentious case) runs counter to postcolonial scholars' identification (self as well as imposed) with colour and my/the received knowledge of women of colour as silenced.

Bolstering this statistic was another, more uncomfortable one: most of the cited names, names that I recognised as subcontinental, were also names I associated with caste privilege, and in the case of non-Hindu names, with conversion into Christianity. In the case of Muslim names, courtly lineage and patronage under the Mughals and their tremendous legacy in the arts and culture, or urban and diasporic migration, would be the determining factors that would enable access to the higher reaches of education. The power, and indeed sanction or injunction, to speak was a right conferred on members of the first group by virtue of their birth, of the second by virtue of their access to a religion privileged under British rule[7], and of the third by a favourable set of inheritances. All three groups would have had access to upward-mobility-guaranteeing English language education and migration-related research opportunities[8] inhering to their ancestral, bureaucratic and professional class privilege, *whether or not* they belonged to the upper or even the middle-class in the subcontinent. *Not a single name* that I came upon, especially in the first and second generations of migratory subcontinental scholars, indicated aboriginal or tribal background; even now they are few and far in between[9]. Given this scenario, it becomes a little hard to swallow the myth of postcolonials as people of colour who cathect the space of subalternity in the academy[10]!

A short list of subcontinental, postcolonial feminist *names* in the contemporary global Anglophone academy attests to their tremendous citational power, achieved within a short span of just fifty years since their political independence and decolonisation: Parveen Adams, Fawzia Afzal-Khan, Bina Agarwal, Vijay Agnew, Sara Ahmed, Meena Alexander, Suki Ali, Anjali Arondekar, Firdous Azim, Nurjehan Aziz, Deepika Bahri, Himani Bannerji, Mukulika Bannerji, Mahasveta Barua, Amrita Basu, Parminder Bhachu, Nilufer S Bharucha, Nandi Bhatia, Anannya Bhattacharjee, Gargi Bhattacharya, Kum-Kum Bhavnani, Shampa Biswas, Brinda Bose, Purnima Bose, Avtar Brah, Urvashi Butalia, Uma Chakravarti, Sumita S Chakravarty, Hema Chari, Indrani Chatterjee, Piya Chatterjee, Lola Chatterji, Nupur Chaudhuri, Geeta Chowdhry, Radhika Coomaraswamy, Vilashini Cooppan, Vrinda Dalmiya, Veena Das, Tania Das Gupta, Esha Niyogi De, Denise deCaires Narain, Manisha Desai, Radhika Desai, Vanaja Dhruvarajan, Anuradha Dingwaney, Enakshi Dua, Mallika Dutt, Leela Fernandes, Leela Gandhi, Debjani Ganguly, Keya Ganguly, Rosemary Marangoly George, Bishnupriya Ghosh, Devleena Ghosh, Gayatri Gopinath, Inderpal Grewal, Amita Handa, Huma Ibrahim, Naheed Islam, Amina Jamal, Kumari Jayawardena, Radha Jhappan, Mary E John, Madhavi Kale, Sukeshi Kamra, Ratna Kapur, Indira Karamcheti, Aisha Khan, Shahnaz Khan, Ketu Katrak, Ranjana Khanna, Revathi Krishnaswamy, Radha Kumar, Shompa Lahiri, Ania Loomba, Sunaina Maira, Lata Mani, Purnima Mankekar, Renissa Mawani, Sucheta Mazumdar, Radhika Mohanram, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, Nivedita Menon, Arun Prabha Mukherjee, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Vrinda Nabar, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, Sheila Nair, Uma Narayan, Sushiela Nasta, Nalini Natarajan, Tejaswini Niranjana, Veena Oldenburg Talwar, Uma Parameswaran, Pratibha Parmar, Zakhia Pathak, Suvendrini Perera, Nalini Persram, Liz Philipose, Jasbir Kaur Puar, Jyoti Puri, Nirmal Puwar, Gita Rajan, Tilottama Rajan, Kalpana Ram, Sangeeta Ray, Sherene H Razack, Parama Roy, Modhumita Roy, Aparajita Sagar, Amrohini Sahay, Ranu Samantrai, Kumkum Sangari, Tanika Sarkar, Sonita Sarker, Sabina Sawhney, Anita Sheth, Falguni Sheth, Manju Sheth, Ranjana Siddhanta-Ash, Mrinalini Sinha, Vandana Shiva, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Rajini Srikanth, Sara Suleri, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Giti Thadani, Romila Thapar, Susie Tharu, Sunera Thobani, Saadia Toor, Sangeeta Tyagi, Sudesh Vaid, Urvashi Vaid, Ruth Vanita, Asha Varadharajan, Mary Vasudeva, Gauri Viswanathan and Kamala Visweswaran, to name but a few of the prominent ones!

A closer look at the scholarship by the names above reveals that many of them question the meaning of 'South Asian' even as they bring out or contribute to anthologies like *Our Feet Walk the Sky: Women of the South Asian Diaspora, Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America, Her Mother's Ashes: and Other stories by South Asian Women in Canada and the United States, Desilicious: Sexy, Subversive, South Asian, Red Silk: An Anthology of South Asian Canadian Women Poets, Red Threads: The South Asian Queer Connection in Photographs*, etc. Clearly, mapping South Asian identity and scholarship was not just an obsession of mine alone! Subcontinental or South Asian feminists examine the meaning of a nationalist postcolonial agenda and its affects in the diaspora, the effects of a continuing 'traditional' patriarchy in the increasingly fundamental regimes of ruling and the meaning of migration and multinationals in a globalised world. Together, they interrogate what Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani have identified as the "crosscurrents" of and "crosstalk" around a politics of location (275) and Vilashini Cooppan contends has been incorrectly denounced as a "particularly specious kind of essentialist politics" focused around the categories of "race and nation" (7). This dissertation takes up both strands of scholarship for analysis.

The central image of this dissertation is 'hotfooting': a hotfooting around issues of essentialism that have energised, enabled and enervated Anglo-North American feminist discourse in the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century. While hotfooting means making a quick escape or a getaway, my central image speaks to the impossibility of escape from the task at hand. I do not use the word hotfoot to mean the adverb 'in haste' neither do I intend the idiomatic usage of hurrying towards or catching up after something, though I cannot deny the unmistakable echo of Barbara Christian's "The Race for Theory" either. What I have in mind is quite literal, but very specific too. It is a verb, a *do-ing*, act-ing word. What I call it is a *hotfooting*, a hopping off and on the blazing, burning grounds of identity and what constitutes our sense of intrinsic, divided and multiple selves in the contemporary world.

Imagine a sun-scorched, burning cement and mosaic courtyard in New Delhi. It is close to 45 degrees celsius. Clothes have been hung out to dry in the morning by the maid-servant who comes to clean the house. Obviously it is a middle-class household. But not middle-class enough that she returns to fold and put away the clothes. It falls to the daughter of the house to do the needful before the clothes are bleached of all their colour in the merciless Indian summer. She steps out gingerly, hopping from one foot to another. As she unclips the clothes one by one from their pins, she cannot for a moment rest her two feet squarely on the burning surface of the courtyard. She must hurry and gather up all those clothes. She must shift, very quickly, from the toes and balls of one foot to another and run back inside with her load, before the sun bakes her too, to a crisp brown papadam....

This is just an image. An image not completely coherent, not completely consistent; it does not make full or even circular logic. And yet, as I have started on my path of discovery and study of feminist theory under the signs of the West, this is the image that has come to me, again and again, in startling clarity. The hot courtyard is the field of feminist and women's studies, the clothes hanging out on the line the many issues that need attention, and I, a dutiful daughter of English literary studies, must take them down, hopping from one foot to another, and fold them away in neat piles of narratives, to be taken out and worn and crumpled and soiled again tomorrow. The maid may not come tomorrow: I need to ask what function the maid fulfils for me. As I dispose of the task today, I know there is yet another load tomorrow, under different skies, under a different sun.

September 1998-August 2007
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

One word about the footnoting: I found as I wrote my arguments that I had to keep on qualifying and supplementing them. Many declarations had an equal and opposite, equally justifiable caveat. Thus the footnotes should not be taken just as literal excesses or extraneous material, but reconsiderations and qualified reiterations of the points I make in the chapters themselves.

Endnotes

[1] I prefer to use English spellings with regard to 'ou' as in colour, as opposed to color, and 's' as in decolonisation, as opposed to the 'z'. However, in citations, the original spellings have been retained throughout the dissertation.

[2] An altogether familiar journey in the politics of recognition, interpellation and self-identification for women of colour. See *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Making Face/Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras* and *this bridge called home* for examples of this kind of conscientisation and politicisation.

[3] There is of course a long history of how women in non-European spaces were constructed as racialised and sexualized Others for white colonisers. And yet, this would not be the *everyday*, common-sense self-identification of the peoples from such locations after colonialism, either before or after modern nation states came into being, post-independence. The racialisation continues in white-settler nations and it is with somewhat of a shock of recognition that the migrant woman recognises herself in the same old colonial trope. Her sense of national affiliation is also given shape at this stage, where earlier there might be other ways of social identification available to her.

[4] Chandra Talpade Mohanty's famous words in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, which I analyse in Chapter 1.

[5] Am I that Woman: reference to Sojourner Truth who offered that early and fabulous example of the dance around essentialism by effecting a confrontation between racialised body politics and a feminist interpretation of the legacy of slavery in the history of the American nation.

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[6] When I say Indian subcontinental, I mean all the countries in the peninsula formed by the Himalayas in the north and flanked by the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal in the south. This includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Significant nineteenth–century diasporas of this subcontinent are to be found in Fiji, Mauritius, East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda), Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and the U.K. Twentieth century diasporas, which have come to be variously known as Asian, South Asian, East Indians, Asian-American or Indo-Canadian, etc. can be found in the U.K., U.S., Canada, Australia and all over Europe as well as South-East Asia. Given the hegemony India exercises in the region and over its diasporas, it is problematic for me to use the term Indian subcontinental, so I have tried to loosely reference it as the subcontinent or subcontinental. South Asian has come to be adopted as the preferred term of collectivity, coalition, compromise as also contention, to indicate subcontinental diasporic belonging.

[7] This is also true of Jewish (Siona Benjamin) and Zoroastrian (Homi Bhabha) scholars from India, though post-independence started a journey of exodus and now the remaining few communities are a minority in the subcontinent. But even here, the influence of Hindu caste structure is clear. For example, Nathan Katz and Ellen S Goldberg in *The Last Jews of Cochin: Jewish Identity in Hindu India* "do not see 'caste' as entirely Hindu, but rather as a social given in South Asian, with Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian and Jewish variants" and "argue that one way in which minorities could carve out an Indian identity was to organize themselves as a caste" (review of *Kashrut, Caste and Kabbalah: The Religious Life of the Jews of Cochin* by Joan Roland in the *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies* 7: 1, 2007, pp 181-183).

[8] In fact, 'foreign' travel in the pursuit of a much-valued continental education was as much a legacy of subcontinental elite intelligentsia making as Thomas

Macaulay's denunciation of its traditional knowledges; the two go hand in hand. Post-independence, the tussle for third world brains between the capitalist and the communist blocks facilitated further advancement, especially for the group I am interested in: post-1965 academics in Anglo-North America.

[9] I do want to add the caveat that the long statistical sketch is indicative but not conclusive. Given the complexities and contradictions of social stratification in the subcontinent, it would need a far more astute and trained scholar than me to separate the chaff from the grain of my argument. Combined with this is also my sense that caste-and-religion based hierarchies are not equivalent to colonial race categorisation and identification. The region's engagement with self-governance, democracy, socialism, secularism, capitalism and globalisation has also affected identity-formation in intricate ways. Last, subcontinental society is polyvocal, polytheistic and plural (even in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan, which might be mistaken for homogenous societies) in an extraordinary way that defies any kind of categorisation, whether motivated ideologically or non-hegemonically. However, subcontinental society members and their diasporas do hold on to their intrinsic, fundamental, foundational sense of selves in remarkably coherent ways, hotfooting felicitously from one kind of essentialism another!

[10] This footnote has to be read with equal attention to the one above, to indicate that "the political goals of the [newly independent] nation are supposedly determined by a regulative logic derived from the old colony, with its interest reversed: secularism, democracy, socialism, nationalist identity, and capitalist development. Whatever the face of this supposition, it must be admitted that there is always a space in the new nation that cannot share in the energy of this reversal. This space has no established agency of traffic with the culture of imperialism" ("Woman in Difference" 78). The absolutely crucial rider to my

formulation is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 1983 question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" of course. In "Woman in Difference" Spivak again uses the example of Mahasweta Devi's engagement with the "problematic representations of decolonization after a negotiated *political* independence" to assert that "if in the metropolitan migrant context the invocation of heterogeneity can sometimes work against the formation of a resistant collectivity among all the disenfranchised, in the decolonized national context, the strategic deployment of subaltern heterogeneity can make visible the phantasmatic nature of a merely hegemonic nationalism" (79).

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INTRODUCTION: HOTFOOTING AROUND ESSENTIALISM

hotfoot: *adv* in haste: He had come hotfoot from the railway station.

hotfoot it: *informal* to hurry

The Penguin English Dictionary 2^{nd} *Edition.*

All essentialism is strategic.

Inderpal Grewal, walking down the staircase during a fire alarm.
Plenary, *Critical Race Scholarship and the University Conference.*
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. 25th-27th April 2002, Canada.

This is an Anglo-North American dissertation. It took shape in the geo-political territory called Canada, and is influenced by the shadow of its neighbour, the United States of America, but is untouched by any actual presence of Mexico[1]. Its overarching point of reference is trans-Atlantic Anglo-American feminism, in its theoretical and academic versions; the prefix Anglo implies English language feminist theory as well as American feminism's connections with its English foremothers and its Antipodean cousins. My point of entry into Anglo-North American feminism[2] is via an interest and training in postcolonial studies and translation theory. This study is an examination of the 'strategic essentialisms' practiced and performed by the fraught constituency of 'difference' in contemporary academic feminist theory and politics. The specific example of 'difference' I take up is the one offered by diasporic subcontinental Indian scholars, who have variously used the terms third world feminism, postcolonial feminism and transnational feminism to occupy the site of otherness and oppositionality within the women's movement.

Essentialism has enjoyed a long innings on the pitch of continental philosophy: my project does not intend to excavate its classical genealogy or its linguistic, metaphysical or ontological significances[3]. I take it up in the sense in which it has circulated in contemporary Euro-American, and more specifically, in Anglo-North American feminist scholarship for the last twenty years. A contested term, essentialism has proved particularly fraught for feminism and women's studies, which, as epistemologies and institutions, are predicated upon a shared or universal assumption of the *condition of being* a woman[4]. Even as debates ranged in the 1980's and '90s on taking the risk of essentialism (Teresa de Lauretis, Naomi Schor, Elizabeth V Spelman) and for the risk to be strategic (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), we are left today with an overwhelming sense of essentialism as reactionary and a matter of bad faith[5]. Despite the resolution of the duel between essentialism-constructionism as follows, "social constructionism can be unveiled as merely a form of sociological essentialism, a position predicated on the assumption that the subject is, in essence, a social construction" (Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, hereafter referred to as *ES*, 6), we continue to think of essentialist ideas of subjectivity, identity and selfhood as particularly suspect. While most theorists today would agree that the putative subject and object of feminism, 'woman,' no longer has any *inherent* essence, when it comes to the Other of this 'woman,' i.e. the racialised non-European woman, charges of essentialism abound. In fact, I propose that the theoretical foundation of an essential 'woman' is laid precisely at a historical moment when the Other of, and in, feminism raises her hand and asks to be counted in. This study is located at that moment of essential reckoning in feminist identity politics, the 1980s.

The late-1970s and the early-1980s are marked by the cementing of an essentialist idea of *a* or *the* woman as the 'sexually differentiated' subject of feminism. Chela Sandoval identifies this as "Feminism's Great Hegemonic Model"[6] whereby the "constructed typologies" of the gendered Other of universal Man start to dominate "the official stories by which the women's movement has understood itself and its intervention in history" (46.7). This consolidation of 'an essential woman' as the proper subject and object of feminism emerges "out of the matrix of the very discourses denying, permitting and producing difference" in Anglo-North-American feminist contexts (Sandoval 42.3). Instead, the "ubiquitously cited four-phase feminist history of consciousness" of "liberal," "Marxist," "radical / cultural" and "socialist" stages becomes the "cognitive map" of official and received feminism (Sandoval 50.1). Sexual difference as the determining characteristic of feminism is employed in all these stages: "women are the same as men," "women are different from men," "women are superior," and "woman are a racially divided class" (ibid). Sandoval, with others[7], offers an alternative version of this history, connecting the "civil rights movement, the women's movement, and ethnic, race, sex, gender, class, and human liberation movements" in a "differential" or "oppositional consciousness" to the singular map laid out by the hegemonic feminist model (42.3, 43.4). The "original, eccentric, and queer [in]sight" of Sandoval's model was enacted in the years "1968-90" by a "particular and eccentric cohort of U.S. feminists of color who were active across diverse social movements" (43.4). My entry into this history is through a specific section of the cohort: subcontinental and diasporic postcolonial feminists who allied with feminists of colour in their differential consciousnesses.

These postcolonial feminists learn from the Black feminist and women of colour feminist models in the U.S. and are also interpellated by the racialised code of 'colour' in their oppositional stance to a hegemonic feminism. Together, they come to constitute a coalition under the aegis of "U.S. third world feminism" (Sandoval 43.4), the ranks of which Canadian immigrant feminists join as well. Transformed by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E Anzaldúa's 1981 foundational definition of 'woman of colour' in *This Bridge Called My Back*, subcontinental Indian feminists try to carve out a differential space in the academy in solidarity and in collaboration with racialised scholars. However, notwithstanding their own histories of immigration and encounters with state-sponsored multicultural forms of racial discrimination in white-settler colonies, subcontinental scholars retain a sense of 'originary essence' or tentative characteristics defined by their particular pre-immigration national or cultural affiliations. Further, with substantial postcolonial histories of their own[8], diasporic theorists arrive in the U.S. academy as outsiders to its place-specific politics but very much as insiders to its knowledge bureaucracy. They hotfoot around the idea of racialised identity while at the same time occupying the 'space' of colour in their host-country's imagination. They also make the case for specificity and particularity within a pluralist, differential frame, in the name of equality and equity, *within* the universalist feminist imaginary. Here, they *perform* the paradox of diversity and *enact* the profound confusion between the public and the private that has characterised our times since the personal became the political. Walking along the razor's edge of a constructed chromatic hierarchy in white-settler, multicultural nations of Anglo-North America, my primary theorists constantly *hotfoot* between self-identified and state-imposed selves, between their essence and experience, embodiment and ethics, hyphenation and hybridity, authenticity and appropriation, and between being native informants and subalterns. Confronted by a hegemonic feminism that replicates the boundary-keeping and border-maintaining acts of the settler nation-states, these feminists negotiate different ways of belonging to and taking their place in the feminist nation, encountering and unlearning their own privilege of *arrival* in the metropolitan academy.

The red thread running through my discussion of subcontinental diasporic postcolonial feminists is also an *essential* notion of their self-identification as 'Indian' *even as* they wrestle with divergent levels of affiliation with and antagonism to this regional/national construct. The feminists I consider all come to a sense of their Indianness in disparate ways: it is not their primary identity, but they still engage with it as an aesthetic and a home of contention. For the four theorists in my study, Himani Bannerji, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Sherene H Razack and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Indianness becomes the circumscribing nationalist/patriarchal *laxman-rekha*[9] out of which they step gingerly, even as they interrogate its foundational interpellation. Indianness is the locale, concrete and imagined, from which they interrogate the notion of an affective essence. This simultaneously contested and claimed site of Indian identity, or what comes to be known as South Asian identity in the settler-nation context, enables me to argue for an urgent rethinking of essentialism within feminism, a *hotfooting around essentialism* that takes into consideration the intimate correlation between originary physical/psychic places and the processes of arrival in othered spaces.

Chapter One takes up the first generation of subcontinental Indian and of-South-Asian-origin scholars who make their mark on Anglo-North American academe circa the 1980s. It interrogates the particular kinds of essentialisms that South Asian postcolonial feminists entertain when they inhabit analytic categories like 'third world woman' or 'woman of colour.' Using Chandra Talpade Mohanty as a time-specific case-study, I examine how these terms circulate amongst them. I argue that this *extra*-national, post-1965 U.S. immigration group of third world intellectuals is to be distinguished from their peers, i.e. other U.S.-born scholars who answer to the interpellation of and self-identify with the political label 'woman of color' rendered so significant by Moraga and Anzaldúa. Juxtaposing the latter's conceptions of postcolonial national belonging and third-world affiliation with the former's predominantly racialised sense of identity, I question the *primacy* of 'race' (as defined in Anglo-American discourses of immigration – forced and settlement-related — and naturalisation) and the deployment of the term 'woman of colour' as an appropriate analytical vehicle for the dispensation of South Asian *postcolonial* feminist concerns in the force-field of U.S. academe. This chapter is also a response to some recent demands made by feminists of colour and critical race theorists that postcolonial scholarship *must* address race as a central constituent of contemporary global identity.

Chapter Two takes up an analysis of 'women of colour' north of the 49th parallel, with Himani Bannerji and Sherene H Razack, immigrants from India & Pakistan and Trinidad & Tobago, who inhabit the space of Canadian academe as Marxist and transnational feminists respectively.

Both profess an anti-colonial, anti-racist politics as well as an equivocal and evolving relationship with the label 'women of colour'. They are also bodies constructed as visible minorities in the Canadian nation-state. I am interested in their move from one kind of hierarchical, multicultural, heterogeneous society where they are marked in particular ways (not necessarily 'visible' at all), to another where they are marked 'visibly' in relation to whiteness. I attempt to analyse how South Asian scholars from Other sites understand what, for them, is a departure from their received, learned privilege as the elite intellectuals in their nations of origin (both imagined and geo-political) and how they come into an understanding of themselves as raced or coloured in their white-settler nations of domicile. How do they thematise what has to be a symbolic *re*-positioning of their status in a new site of recognition? My method in this chapter is to look at the critical inventories of their selves and their itineraries of academic travel as they carve out a transnational space between here and there, and go about unsettling relations of power and negotiating ways of belonging in this settler-nation and that originary or imagined one.

Chapter Three analyses how Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak essays the role of public intellectual and *the* postcolonial critic in 45 interviews given in as many years, and how she inaugurates her famous moment of "strategic essentialism" in the embodied, corporeal space of an interview. I suggest that a) Spivak is best understood as a 'figure' of postcoloniality, and b) it is in her work in interviews that she provides the key to the interpretive frame of the world as she sees it. These interviews offer a "psychobiography" of the postcolonial critic who *arrives* on the Anglo-

American academic scene circa the 1980s and makes it 'the home and the world' of postcolonial representation. Her continuing, life-long work on the problematic of representation is foregrounded and heightened in the interview format. These interviews provide an invaluable gloss to Spivak's often obtuse and obdurate, frighteningly erudite and scholarly theoretical prose. This gloss is in itself an important strategic method, a method she uses to great effect to deconstruct the politics of reading and of translation (of the 'subject,' of 'culture,' and of history). The interviews enable us to overcome our fear of Spivak and enter her body of work as a rite of passage, a passage that is a journey through 'postcolonialism' itself.

The rest of this introduction sketches the backdrop and surveys the lie of the land[10] around feminist essentialism and difference circa the 1980s. I read the discussions of sexual differentiation by hegemonic feminists of the time against contemporaneous debates in the field of oppositional and differential knowledges. In the nation of feminism, bodies conceived as necessarily Other and different pose the challenge against which sexual *différance* must constantly defend its borders. Those who do not participate in the essentialist rhetoric of gendered differentiation are first accused of being essentialists of the wrong kind, and then put outside the jurisdiction of the legitimate feminist nation. I argue for a closer look at how these alternative conceptions of being and belonging function and how affiliation to place, geographical location and national identity influence the ways in which *all* feminism operates. This discussion then leads into my exploration of immigrant subcontinental Indian postcolonial scholars in white-settler nations in the body chapters.

Essentialism and its Contents:

> Borrowed from the time-honored vocabulary of philosophy, the word essentialism has been endowed within the context of feminism with the power to reduce to silence, to excommunicate, to consign to oblivion. Essentialism in modern day feminism is anathema.
>
> Naomi Schor. "This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming To Grips With Irigaray." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 40.

The *circulation* of the concept of essentialism is of concern to me, at that particular feminist juncture in Anglo-North-American academe when it becomes contentious and cacophonous. It becomes clear in my historical survey that the articulation and address of difference by both hegemonic and oppositional feminisms is *the* locus in which essentialism acquires it contemporary salience. A cluster of texts marks the emergence of this debate, another its apotheosis (1986-89), and yet others the dissensions to essentialism in feminist theory (the politics of location, standpoint feminism, cultural essence, etc.), all in the short time-span of 1980-1997. What follows is an idiosyncratic but indicative sketch, and the lengthy, chronologically-arranged appendix at the end of this chapter lists the flash-points of this debate. I start with the axiom that the hegemonic, colonial discourse of essence is intimately connected to the creation of 'difference' as the philosophy of containment of plurality in multicultural white settler-nations. In considering my chosen texts in schematic but selective detail, I show how this *management* policy based on cultural and racialised differences, is mirrored in the 1980s feminist discussions around inclusion and exclusion, which is *how* it consolidates the 'proper' subject of/for feminism. In the process, the historicities and specificities of immigrant and othered feminists from separate geo-political spheres (who now were beginning to demand their rightful place in the academy and in knowledge production) are circumscribed within a gender-identity dominant imaginary that can only be defined as *the feminist nation*. The hegemonic move of dominant feminism (based on sexual differentiation) is strenuously and stringently contested by poststructuralist, postcolonial and deconstructionist feminists, also on the grounds of essentialism.

One will do well at the outset to remember Diana Fuss's advisory that "in and of itself, essentialism is neither good nor bad, progressive nor reactionary, beneficial nor dangerous" and therefore the question we should be asking is not "is this text essentialist (and therefore 'bad')?" but rather, "if this text is essentialist, *what motivates its deployment*?" (*ES* xi, emphasis in the original). My question, to follow up on Fuss's is this: what determines ***if*** a text is essentialist? Are there in-essential texts? Are there texts exempt from the particular burdens and blessings of essence? If it turns out that indeed there are none, then what do we do with the charge of essentialism that is laid with so much pejorative force against 'special' interest groups? And if it turns out that *all* interest groups, e.g. woman, black, Hindu, lesbian, myopic, musically-inclined, meat-eating, *are special*, i.e. unique and differentiated from the general or the whole, is there a way in which we can recuperate essentialism for re-examination? Might there be some value in starting from this foothold of 'essence' in order to work out how or whether this might be useful for the purposes of addressing the urgent concerns of these groups? Might there be value then in letting go of anti-essentialism? Can we, yet again, take the risk of essence, this time not on the basis of gender or culture, but based on our capitalised as well as small-case H/histories of consciousnesses, wherein we privilege our primary affiliative essentialisms within a larger corpus?

I use a working definition of essentialism as "a philosophical and ideological mode of analysis in which determinate real phenomena are 'explained' by reference to the essence — 'Life', 'Man', 'the Greek Spirit', or what have you — that they are held to express" (Hindess & Hirst 9)[11]. Nominally essential descriptors are indeed the means by which subjects in society or community understand and express themselves, even as they negotiate complex, simultaneous selves that might not fully occupy these named labels. Social subjects hotfoot around these essences and fashion their affective, composite, fragmented, and altogether variegated bodies in continual engagement with the primary descriptors of the categories that they are *most* invested in. It is in this sense that all essentialism is strategic and bound to the social and the political. Thus feminism as a movement and a methodology hotfoots around a plea for *woman's cause* in patriarchy, in empire, in environment, in affect and in body, even as it contests the primacy of the status of something described and defined as 'woman'. An inability to consolidate the subject of feminism is built into its foundational structure. This inability, sometimes seen as undesirable indeterminacy, is what I call *hotfooting*: a hotfooting around being and not being, being and becoming, whatever the affective project of feminism impels each one of us towards, together and individually, in harmony and in conflict. In this project, I am absolutely unwilling to cede the grounds of feminism as a necessary oppositional theory of our times. All of us *are* feminists in this project, hegemonic or otherwise, or else this conversation would not be taking place. Here I am mindful of feminism being both an ideal and a pragmatics, an ethics and a politics, invested in the singularity of experience as well as the universal conception of equity and equality. Despite apocalyptic visions of the doomed project and feared demise of feminism, I believe that the future of feminism[12] will be better served if we admit to, embrace and exculpate, name and negate, and *therefore* hotfoot around *all* the essentialisms that *we as feminists* engage in, at home and in the world, in theory and in the academy, in the class and in the nation, without ever having the luxury of planting our feet firmly down on any one burning terrain. For this to happen, however, we first have to take a hard look at, and talk about, the ways in which we are invested in certain essential identities, both foundational and relational. This introduction makes the case for essentialism to be revalued as a historically grounded, geographically contingent and affectively conceived political tool for socio-epistemological feminist transformations.

Of Essence and Existence:

> *Essence*, in its primary signification [meaning], means the principle of *individuation* [individual existence], the inmost principle of the possibility of anything, as that particular thing. It is equivalent to the *idea* of a thing, whenever we use the word "idea" with philosophic precision.
>
> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1817.
> qtd. Harry Shaw, *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1972.
> 143, emphases and square brackets in the original.

As a theoretical term, essentialism did not have much academic purchase even till the mid-1970's, when Raymond Williams brought out *Keywords:*

a vocabulary of culture and society. Essentialism does not merit an entry in that 1976 publication[13]. The word 'essence' appears, but is embedded in the entry on 'Existential' wherein Williams makes a tenuous connection between "**existence** and the apparently alternative word **essence** (C14; fw *essence*, F, *essentia*, L – being)" (123, emphases in the original). Pre-17th century, existence and essence are in contrast to each other; essence being the "fundamental or absolute being" and existence the "perceptible and therefore actual being" (Williams 123). Williams locates 19th century interest in the term essence for the Romantics, particularly in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. I mention Williams's seminal work not because he is necessarily the last authority on critical terms, but because *Keywords*, in his own words, "is not a dictionary or glossary of a particular academic subject" (15). Rather, it is "the record of an inquiry into a vocabulary: a shared body of words and meanings in our most general discussions in English, of the practices and institutions which we group as culture and society" (ibid). It is in this sense of shared words and meaning-making in contemporary discussions of academic feminism that I intend the term essentialism. This conversation around essentialism is conducted on the terms of its received and revisionist significances in order to maintain the necessary astringency of the concept.

I am struck by the relation between 'individuation' and 'essence' too, which is the hinge on which any discussion of contemporary identity must turn. Again, Williams' handy entry on "**Individual**" gives us the "extraordinary social and political history" of the word (161). He tells us that in "medieval theological argument," it "originally meant indivisible" (162, 161). It is only in the articulation of a social sphere through the idea of a commonwealth in John Locke's *Human Understanding* (1690) that the modern meaning of 'individual' begins to emerge. In the 18th century, the word acquires a new inflection via Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, 1776: "among the savage nations of hunters and fishers, every individual... is... employed in useful labour" (Williams 163). I do not need to belabour how an encounter with the Other leads to the production of an individual, universal self, assisted ably by "logic" and "biology" (ibid). Then the 19th century witnesses the "remarkable efflorescence of the word" in Darwin and in the political thought of the Enlightenment via Hobbes, Burke and Marx (163, 164). Williams makes the important distinction between individuality, which "has the longer history and comes out of the complex of meanings in which **individual** developed, stressing both a unique person [courtesy of the Romantics] and his (indivisible) membership of a group" and the term individualism, a 19th century "coinage and 'a novel expression to which a novel idea has given birth' (tr. Tocqueville, 1835): a theory not only of abstract individuals but of the primacy of individual states and interests" (165, emphases and brackets in original, square parentheses mine).

Two points are clear: 1) the idea of an individual with an essence (i.e. differentiated from another's essence) follows from the "breakup of the medieval social, economic and religious order" in Europe, and 2) the necessity of differentiation within that shared civic sphere follows from the *acknowledgment* of a community (Williams 163). The late-18th and 19th century insistence on individuation in European political thought, i.e. "to give individuality or individual form to (somebody or something); to differentiate or distinguish (them)" (*The Penguin Dictionary*) is also accompanied by the consolidation of 'essence' as *the* imperial tool to categorise and subjugate non-Europeans. This is when anthropology and evolutionary science join hands to create the idea of the 'human' as an entity distinct from the 'divine' and pressed in service of capitalism and colonialism. An essence of the Enlightened self in relation to the Other is constructed in order to determine the human condition and to decide who or what constitutes or belongs to the category of the human. This is not to say that other, non-European cultures did not have their own systems of differentiation, but that in the context of colonialism and its continuing aftermath, it becomes crucial for us to pay attention to the historical ways in which essence has been deployed. In the case of hegemonic feminism's prioritisation of sex/gender over race, and indeed anxiety over other kinds of identity affiliations, it is imperative that we become more cognisant of our "multiple mediations" (to borrow Lata Mani' felicitous phrase, 1) and of our intimate investments in the different projects of feminism.

Essentialism *in* Difference:

> The theme of "difference" has been integral to modern feminist thought from at least the time of the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, and in particular since the rebirth of the women's movement in the late 1960s.
>
> Hester Eisenstein, "Introduction," *The Future of Difference*. xv.

> Is there a way to think outside the patriarchally determined Same/Other, Subject/Object dichotomies diagnosed as the fact of culture by Simone de Beauvoir thirty years ago, and in the process, still include women as a presence? Alice Jardine, "Prelude," *The Future of Difference*. xxvi.

In 1979, Barnard College Women's Centre hosted its sixth "The Scholar and The Feminist" conference titled "The Future of Difference." Papers from that conference were published in 1980 by Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine under the same title. It is evident from the quotes above as well as the collected essays in the book that what constituted the object of feminism was an essentially conceived subject: something gendered and socialised as 'woman'. It is equally evident that contestations of the same were initiated at this moment, in what was seen as the 'rebirth' of the feminist movement. Eisenstein perceptively points out that the essential "condition and experience of being female" had *not* proved to be "more important in defining women than the specifics of [their] differences from each other" (xvii). Equally important is Jardine's acknowledgment of the "tightrope of contradictions between the French and American feminist stances" even though they both were dealing with the question of feminist essentialism *within* its differences (xxvi)[14]. Jardine cites Elaine Marks that "American feminists emphasize the *oppression* of woman as sexual identity, while French feminists investigate the *repression* of woman as difference and alterity in the signifying practices of the West" (qtd. xxvi). While Eisenstein recognises that the focus on woman's sexed inscription in culture and language "stemmed from a profound understanding of the political uses of difference" (xvii), Jardine offers the historical answer to why difference *now* had such "high epistemological and political stakes":

> It couldn't have been done ten years ago. It is perhaps related to a larger historical shift away from Hamlet's founding question, "To be or not to be?" — the anguished "who am I?" — toward that fundamentally twentieth-century question, "Who is speaking?" (Jardine, xxvi-xxvii)

Indeed the question of authorship over both speech and subjecthood was the defining characteristic of the new century, for all those who had been subjected and objectified: women, colonised peoples, class-outcastes.

In the academy, a difference is evident in the literary symposia on "Writing and Sexual Difference" & "The Politics of Interpretation" (1980) as also "'Race,' Writing, and Difference" (1984) to which 'third world' and racialised scholars were invited, the proceedings of which were published in special issues of *Critical Inquiry*. They are evidenced in assertions of voice, agency and subjectivity by Black women staking their claim to the feminist platform at conferences in the U.S. and the U.K. and by the term 'women of colour' coming into play in North America. The politics of location, experience and standpoint seek to situate feminisms within the very conditions of their possibility. Poststructuralism, postcolonialism and deconstruction constitute a "theoretical genealogy" responsible for "the multiple points of articulation that connect base and superstructure, economic and cultural determinations, hegemony and counter-hegemony, subjectivity and agency" at this time (Cooppan 5). Let me take up two examples of the deep-seated, but occluded, interconnectedness between gender essentialism and colonised/racialised identification from 1986-89, which were particularly important years for the articulation of 'difference' in Euro- and Anglo-American academic feminisms, and which constitute the genealogy of 'essentialism' in feminism.

In 1986, the *Oxford Literary Review* brings out a special issue on "Sexual Difference" edited by Robert Young. Toril Moi starts her article, "Existentialism and Feminism: the Rhetoric of Biology in the Second Sex," with the words: "For a feminist today *The Second Sex* is in many ways a deeply embarrassing document..." (88). The article assumes as its subject and object the feminist who refuses to participate in Simone de Beauvoir's "bad faith (*mauvaise foi*)" about the female body and its slimy secretions, and who rejects "biology as a determinant factor — as an origin — of women's oppression" (Moi 89). Ideology is instead "the main repressive weapon in the patriarchal arsenal" (Moi 91). Moi is trapped in a similar rhetorical gesture however when she constructs for her audience, "the feminist today," an emancipatory "political project" extrapolated from de Beauvoir's poetics in the "site of *struggle* and not a pure — male or female — enclosure" (95). Her feminist subject is an essentially gendered one who assumes a common 'our'-ness when Moi sees the "*context* of our discourse which produces the meanings of our words" vacillate between these two raceless and classless poles: male and female, however impure they might be (95, emphasis in the original, underscoring mine)[15]. In the very same issue of the *OLR*, Spivak writes on "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" (referred to as ISD hereafter) and this is what she has to say:

> ... a critical philosopher initially discovers that the basis of a truth-claim is no more than a trope. In the case of academic feminism the discovery is that to take the privileged male of the white race as a norm for universal humanity is no more than a politically interested figuration. It is a trope that passes itself off as truth, and claims that woman or the racial other is merely a kind of troping of that truth of man — in the sense that they must be understood as unlike (non-identical with) it and yet *with* reference to it. In so far as it participates in this discovery, even the most 'essentialist' feminism or race-analysis is engaged in a tropological deconstruction. (Spivak, "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" 225)

The deconstruction of such tropological truth-claim-making of patriarchy, what Spivak calls the "homoerotic Great Tradition" is what emerges as the foundation of Euro- and Anglo-American feminism at this time.

Jenny Sharpe links this deconstruction of the universalist, male and liberal-humanist trope to the feminist desire to chisel out a 'voice of their own' in a "poetics of women's writing that centers on selfhood and self-consciousness... undeniably informed" by the "consciousness-raising so crucial to the women's movement of the 1970s" (30). Sharpe explains how the feminist canon of "*autos-bios-graphein*" was established: just as the literary "self-writing of a life" is guided by a "desire to authorize the life that has been lived, academic feminism authors itself through lives that can be identified as not simply female but feminist" (ibid). However, Sharpe's teacher Spivak notes that an "access to autobiography, for whole groups of people, has only been possible through the dominant mediation of an investigator or field-worker" who uses "objective evidence" provided by the colonised and objectified "native informant" in aid of the "sciences of anthropology and ethnolinguistics" (ISD 229)[16]. Voicing a narrative for such entities is an entirely different matter when in "academic Women's Resource Groups," "curricular planning," "the distribution of resources," hegemonic feminism "celebrates the heroines of the First World in a singular and individualist" fashion, while "the collective presence of women elsewhere" is deemed "pluralized and inchoate" (ISD 237). This imperial trope of dominant feminism "can only be shored up by strategic exclusions" and "conventionally sanctioned carelessness about identities" (ISD 226, 230). Since "sexual difference comes into play only in the white arena," Spivak continues, much of "third-worldist feminist work has taken on the task of the effacement of the investigator in works typically entitled 'Women Speak'" in order to ensure the "subject-status" and "human-ness" of the Other in feminism (ISD 236, 229, 231). Such negotiated occupation of "the representative or blank space presupposed by the dominant text," in turn, inevitably catches the invented voice of the feminist Other "within the institutional performance of the imperialist lie" (ISD 239). But this "clearing of a subject-position in order to speak or write is unavoidable," even when it is "complicitous with the institution in which it seeks its space" (ISD 229, 225). This formulation is precursor to Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism and echoes Sandoval's idea of tactical subjectivity[17].

My second example of essentialism within difference is Michéle Barrett's 1987 article, "The Concept of 'Difference'" in *Feminist Review* which posits that "the critique of 'essentialism' in thinking about sexual identity... is a child of the mid-1980s," following *feminist* psychoanalytic and post-structuralist re-interpretations of Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault. This is the defining moment when in "modern feminism a sense of 'difference' as the recognition of diverse social experience" becomes "politically important" and "the question of the fixity of sexual difference" as the determining *différance* of feminist identity becomes contentious (Barrett 30, 37). Barrett delineates three kinds of difference: Difference I: "a relatively 'commonsensical' term for social, experiential diversity," Difference II: a "positional meaning" derived via "linguistic opposition rather than by absolute reference," Difference III: a "sexual identity" that focuses on "representation and the theory of signification" (30, 33, 38). Of the three, Barrett distinguishes that "Difference I inclines towards essentialism, Difference II is deconstructive in its approach to gendered subjectivity," and the last, "Difference III has generated a debate that divides its theorists into some characteristic features of both I and II" (39). I find it revealing that what Barrett considers to be *the* "pragmatic definition of difference... relying on experience as a guide to both theory and politics" is the one she also labels as essentialist (30). This difference, she contends, arises from the claims of "nation, region and ethnicity, as well as age, sexual orientation, disability and religion" in addition to the new "widespread recognition of both class and racism" (ibid). In Barrett's analysis, this is proof that such "feminist intellectual separatism tends to go along with a broadly essentialist outlook, although the 'essence' invoked may be cultural and historical rather than biological" (31).

It is probably only the flimsiest of coincidences that Barrett's piece in the Summer issue of *Feminist Review* follows one by Trinh T Minh-ha on "Difference: 'A Special Third World Women Issue'" in the Spring issue. Trinh understands difference as "a tool of self-defence and conquest," used with "a kind of perverted logic, [whereby] they work toward your erasure while urging to keep your way of life and ethnic values *within the borders of your homelands*" (6). Connecting the idea of a homeland and the (feminist) nation to the colonial policy and "apartheid language" of a "separate development," she traces the idea of 'difference' to capitalism, anticipating Norma Alarçon's comments about women in *maquiladoras* and recalling Spivak's about Other women being race maids in academe[18]. Trinh exposes the connections between the geographical division of the spoils in the Great House of colonialism, of the territorial possession and the apartheid "policy" of feminist "differentiation" that allows "me to have better control over my nation while looking after yours, helping you thereby gradually to stand on your own" (7):

> Given the permanent status of 'foreign workers', we — like the South African blacks who are allowed to toil on white territories as 'migrants', but are gotten rid of and resettled to the homeland area as soon as they become unprofitable labour units — continue in most cases to be treated as 'temporary sojourners', even though we may spend our whole lifetime by their side pleading a common cause. (Trinh, 8)

Change of personal pronouns notwithstanding, Trinh leaves her readers in no doubt who she means by the 'us' and 'them'. Using the example of Sojourner Truth who was asked to expose her breasts in order to prove that she was a woman, Trinh comprehends difference "reduced to sexual identity" as the ruse to "justify and conceal exploitation" (18). She asserts that in a dominant feminist nation, the "Body, the most visible difference between men and women, the only one to offer a secure ground for those who seek the permanent, the feminine 'nature' and 'essence,' remains the safest basis for racist and sexist ideologies" (ibid). Barrett's rejoinder that the conceptualisations of difference within categories of women versus between men and women are "more in competition than they are complementary" hits the nail on the head quite inadvertently (29). From now on, hegemonic feminism routinely deploys what Naomi Schor calls "the shock-troops of anti-essentialism" against the challenges posed by those who do not put gender differentiation at the center of their feminist method but choose other subject-positions from which they may argue their oppositional politics and standpoint epistemologies ("Introduction" vii).

The Battle *for* Essentialism:

> *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* first appeared in 1989 at the moment of a critical encounter — a head-on collision, one might say — of theories of difference (primarily Continental) and the politics of diversity (primarily American). In the ensuing years, the journal has established a critical forum where the problematic of differences is explored in texts ranging from the literary and the visual to the political and social. *differences* highlights theoretical debates across the disciplines that address the ways concepts and categories of difference — notably but not exclusively gender — operate within culture.
>
> Statement of Intent, <http://www.dukeupress.edu/differences/>

1989 was a water-shed year in recuperating essentialism as an important tool for feminist theorising. Elizabeth V Spelman had just published her *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (referred to as *IW* hereafter), the changed title of what was previously going to be *Out of Their Minds: Philosophers on Women, Slaves, Emotions and the Body*, signaling how important the terms 'essential' and 'exclusion' had become for feminism. *differences* brought out a special summer issue on "essential difference: another look at essentialism," the essays from which still stand the test of time[19]. Diana Fuss published *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference*. In this section, I take up a discussion of Spelman as also three essays from the *differences* issue, by Diana Fuss, Naomi Schor and Teresa de Lauretis. A significant interview of Spivak by Ellen Rooney, in the same issue of *differences*, in which she revises her notion of strategic essentialism is taken up in detail in my last chapter, so I will just reference it here and leave it without any further discussion[20].

Spelman's book starts with the exclusionary treatment of 'women' in traditional Western philosophical thought in the corpus of Aristotle and Plato and traces their continuing legacy in modern feminist thought as in de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. She then analyses Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* in order to lay bare the "hierarchical and differentiated social worlds" defined by the sexual division of labour (*IW* 82). An examination of the "'nonrelational' sphere where men have their primary location, and a private, 'relational' sphere where women have their 'primary social and economic location'" leads Chodorow to quickly realise that the "'capitalist world of work' in Western society" is actually marked by oppressions other than just sexual difference (qtd. Spelman 83). This last chapter prefigures Spelman's discussion of "Gender and Race" which she calls "The Ampersand Problem in Feminist Thought." This chapter, which is really the basis on which her concept of "inessential woman" rests, is a revised version of a 1982 article, "Theories of Race and Gender: The Erasure of Black Women," in *Quest: a feminist quarterly*. This essay is of interest to me, even though in the contemporary context, her arguments seem dated and obvious. Her earlier chapters examined "how attempts to focus on gender in isolation from other aspects of identity such as race and class can work to obscure the effect race, class, and gender can have on each other" (*IW* 114). In "Gender and Race," Spelman focuses her attention on "how additive analyses of identity and of oppression... work against an understanding of the relations between gender and other elements of identity, between sexism and other forms of oppression" (*IW* 115). She is one of the few white feminists of the time to link the "somatophobia" in the women's movement to "white solipsism," made famous by Adrienne Rich in 1979, and to consider seriously the "interlocking" of oppressions (*IW* 126, 116, 123)[21]. This is noteworthy only because the veritable chorus of non-white voices that challenged sexual difference went unheard in hegemonic feminist theory. Spelman's brave ground-breaking work (for a white feminist) is referenced by none of the three feminists in *differences* either. Spelman correctly identifies "the phrase 'as a woman' as the Trojan horse of feminist ethnocentrism" (*IW* x), and while Fuss, Schor and de Lauretis too object to the phrase, their nuanced arguments are grounded far more securely and squarely within a binaristic Western philosophical tradition, from which Spelman had tried to move away, albeit unsuccessfully. Ultimately though, Spelman's work does not remain salient over time, rooted as it is in the idea of 'inclusion' as the corrective to the issue of 'exclusion' in feminism. White feminism is the homogenous ground on which she wants "the difference" and the "particular reality of the Black woman's experience" to be represented. Those binaries remain intact and are reproduced through 'difference'.

Diana Fuss takes the bull by the horns in her article "Reading Like a Feminist" (referred to hereafter as RLF). She locates her question "does essentialism inhere in anti-essentialism?" in the controversial 1987 book *Men in Feminism* edited by Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, and in essays like Peggy Kamuf's "Writing Like a Woman" (1980), Jonathan Culler's "Reading as a Woman" (1982), Tania Modleski's "Feminism and the Power of Interpretation" (1986) and Robert Scholes' "Reading Like a Man" (1987). She concludes that each of these articles operates in "the very slippages between 'woman,' 'women,' 'female,' and 'feminist'" so as to "defer the question of reading as or *like* a feminist — the question, in other words, of *political identification*" (81, emphasis in the original). Fuss brilliantly argues that the "essentialist dilemma at the heart of these theories of reading" is manifest in their "preoccupation with the question of place, specifically with the problem of where men stand in relation to feminism" (83). She argues that what is "*essential* to social construction is precisely this notion of 'where I stand,' of what has come to be called, appropriately enough, 'subject-positions'" (ibid.) Fuss uses the notion of positionality to interrogate "not only the place of essentialism but the essentialism of place" (ibid). Oddly though, in her definition, "place" is not a referent for a geographical or physical location at all, but derived entirely from Lacan's poststructuralist reading of Descartes' Cartesian dualism and Freud's psychoanalytical frame. I quote:

> It is especially significant that throughout his work Lacan always speaks in terms of the *place* of the subject. His subversive rewriting of Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" (*cogito ergo sum*) as "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think" provides a good case in point (166). The emphasis in Lacan's anti-cogito falls in the "where"; the question "who is speaking" can only be answered by shifting the grounds of the question to "where am I speaking from?" But it is important to remember that the place of the subject is nonetheless, ultimately, unlocalizable; were we able to fix the whereabouts of the subject in a static field of determinants, then we would be back in the realm of ego psychology. (RLF 84, emphases in the original)

To come so far in deconstructing "phallocentrism's latest ruse" and to end up in the prison-house of masculinist tropology again (Spivak qtd. 86)!

So far in the article, Fuss had consistently argued against any validation of or granting of authorship to 'women's experience' on the basis of their sexually differentiated bodies. Agreeing with John Locke's notion of a "nominal essence" rather than "irreducible and unchanging" Aristotelian "real essences," Fuss had regarded experience as something that is "not just a *construct* but something that *constructs*" (78, 79). This idea of a "socially-mediated," "semiotically and historically" constructed subjectivity combined with an attention to geographical location or place would give Fuss a powerful excuse for the "terminological convenience" of essentialism (79, 88). But she does not take up the salience of place other than in its philosophical and psychic senses, at the same moment that she argues, "we always read *from somewhere*" (89). This is surprising given that she engages with the historically and geographically 'emplaced' essay by Spivak on "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" in order to demonstrate that we cannot get away from place. Fuss is enamoured of Spivak's "simultaneous critique and *endorsement* of Subaltern Studies's essentialism" to advocate "a *strategic* use of positivistic essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak qtd. RLF 85). She is fired by Spivak's enabling suggestion that "humanism can be activated in the service of the subaltern; in other words, when put into practice by the dispossessed themselves, essentialism can be powerfully displacing and disruptive" (ibid). As "a provisional gesture," this is another version of the clearing of institutional space by the dispossessed, the marginalized, in order to achieve a speaking position (ibid). Fuss uses this Spivakian idea of "a scrupulously visible political interest" to conclude that "it is politics which grounds affinity" for women in feminism (85):

> It is telling, I think, that anti-essentialists are willing to displace "identity," "self," "experience," and virtually every other self-evident category except politics. To the extent that it is difficult to imagine a non-political feminism, politics emerges as feminism's essence. (RLF 90)

But Fuss does not take the idea of politics further. She does not take up the question of *who* needs to clear the space within feminist theory at the time that she is writing. By limiting her discussion to *men in feminism*, she still remains committed to the sexual binary. Given that the urgent feminist political demand of the day was to wrest mere sexual difference away from constructions of identity, this seems a particularly strategic and, if I may argue, a sanctioned, omission. Her 'feminism' as does her 'feminist' continues to read in the tradition of Enlightenment philosophy, in all its imperial and institutional ramifications[22]. While her conclusion remains a powerful one even today, *whose* or *what* politics she 'stands for' and which *place* she 'speaks from' remains transparently invested in maintaining the *status quo* of Western philosophical tenets in feminism.

Naomi Schor's "This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming To Grips With Irigaray" (referred to hereafter as TE) too responds to men in feminism, in particular one man, Jacques Derrida. She takes exception to his suggestion that "in the accumulation of empirical research on women, in the tenuring of feminist scholars, in the seemingly spectacular success of women's studies, the feminist critique of the institution has been scanted" (38), and that "in the eyes of deconstruction women's studies *is* perilously close to becoming 'just another cell in the academic beehive'" (Derrida qtd. Schor 39). Schor is agitated that Derrida's argument is for "a women's studies that would be *essentially* different from its brother and sister disciplines" in the university (39). In this, Schor would be right if she concluded, like Fuss in her reading of Scholes's work, that Derrida's gesture is one of "the often subtle and frequently suspect strategies which, in this instance, (male?) deconstructors employ to master feminism and to put it in its place" (RLF 78). She would be right if she concluded that "deconstruction's de-essentializing gestures are [sometimes] merely re-phallocentrizing appropriations in the end" (ibid). Derrida's questions are of special concern to Schor "because the conflict within the faculty of women's studies has from its inception been to a large extent a conflict — and a very violent one — over essentialism" (ibid). Schor turns to this conflict by taking up a discussion of de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray as examples of essentialist and anti-essentialist French feminists. Notice that again, essentialism is being battled in the philosophical, ontological realm of sexual difference, while the operation of feminism has actually shifted to its practical, political, emplaced institutional sphere, women's studies. So what do we make of Schor's own re-inscribing of the imperial space of universalist feminism at a time when pitched battles are being fought on campuses across the U.S. about affirmative action, calls for attention to the racialised politics of feminism, disputes over academic and publishing discrimination and feuds over political correctness? I cannot help but return to Spivak again (whose imprint on this dissertation is all-pervasive) who insisted in "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" that "the 'correction' of a performative deconstruction is to point at another troping, and thus to another errant performance, that the critique must be persistent" (238).

So on to the persistent critique, in order to discover yet again that "the price of learning such a tropological deconstruction of masculism [is] the performance of a blindness to the other woman in the [feminist] text" (ISD 228). Schor (like Barrett) provides a useful gloss of the different critiques of essentialism: 1) the Liberationist, which "holds that femininity is a cultural construct in service of the oppressive powers of patriarchy," 2) the Linguistic, where "subjects whose sexual inscription is determined solely by the positions they occupy in regard to the phallus... should expose and denaturalize the mechanisms whereby females are positioned as women," 3) the Philosophical, where essentialism is "complicitous with Western metaphysics" but as "a strategic position adopted to achieve specific political goals, feminist essentialism has its place," and 4) The Feminist, the only one to have emerged "from within the women's movement" and where the "majestic singularity Woman conspires in the denial of the very real lived differences — sexual, ethnic, racial, national, cultural, economic, generational — that divide women from each other and from themselves" (TE 41-42). Schor's taxonomic list of essentialism attempts to "de-hystericize the debate" around viable feminist positions and practical politics (TE 50); she reaches the idealistic conclusion that:

> It is precisely around the issues of *differences* among as well as within women that the impasse between essentialism and anti-essentialism is at last beginning to yield: for just as the pressing issues of race and ethnicity are forcing certain anti-essentialists to suspend their critiques in the name of political realities, they are forcing certain essentialists to question their assertion of a female essence that is widely perceived and rightly denounced by minority women as exclusionary. (TE 43)

Teresa de Lauretis's "The Essence of the Triangle or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the U.S., and Britain" (referred to as EoT hereafter) takes the discussion the furthest, not just in terms of recuperating essentialism for feminism, but also in situating a seemingly amorphous Anglo-American debate into national specifications. Her essay may be divided into two convenient halves: 1) a discussion of current essentialist debates in the Anglo-American context, and 2) a rich historical account of one place-specific instance of feminist activity in the "experiential recollections of individuals and groups" of the Milan Women's Bookstore in a 1987 book translated as "Don't Think You Have Any Rights: The Engendering of Female Freedom in the Thought and Vicissitudes of a Women's Group" (EoT 14). de Lauretis explains how, "in elaborating a critical theory based on the practice of sexual difference," this account "also reconstructs *a* history of feminism in Italy from the particular location, the social and political situatedness, of its authors," thus using sexual difference in the service of a larger social critique (13).

The second part of de Lauretis's essay is a wonderful example of taking 'place' seriously and moving out of the impasse of a difference that is constructed solely on the grounds of 'diversity' in Anglo-American hegemonic feminism. What she models is a way of actually bringing in differential knowledges into a critical feminist consciousness by reading the *history* of that difference seriously. She shows that Anglo-American feminism is truly hegemonic when it fails to consider the powerful ways in which women's movements in different parts of the world operate in tandem with and opposition to their particular ideological realities. That gender differentiation in this case does not have to be pitched continually against racial differentiation, thus giving credence to Spivak's conjecture that "sexual difference comes into play only in the white arena" (ISD 236). The feminist milieu in which members of the Milan Women's Bookstore operate does not demand an understanding of female freedom only in "libertarian terms as freedom from all social constraint" (EoT 25). Rather their "radical" idea of freedom "demands no vindication of the rights of woman, no equal rights under the law, but only a full, political and personal, accountability to [other] women" (EoT 26). de Lauretis expands upon the mandate of their manifesto as follows:

> The bold injunction of the title, "don't think you have any rights" (a phrase of Simone Weil's, cited in the epigraph), with its direct address to women and its unequivocal stance of negativity sharply contrasts with the subtitle's affirmation of a freedom for women that is not made possible by adherence to the liberal concept of rights — civil, human, or individual rights — which women do not have *as women*, but is generated, and indeed engendered, by taking up a position in a symbolic community, a "genealogy of women," that is at once discovered, invented, and constructed through feminist practices of reference and address. Those practices, as the book later specifies, include the reading or rereading of women's writings; taking other women's words, thoughts, knowledges, and insights as frames of reference for one's analyses, understanding, and self-definition; and trusting them to provide a symbolic mediation between oneself and others, one's subjectivity and the world. (EoT 14-15)

This is the method by which women in many parts of the words carve out a feminist politics, acknowledging "a personal and social cost, a symbolic debt" that they owe to other women, a radical theorisation far removed from the shenanigans of academic feminisms in Anglo-North America. This is a model that Ranu Samantrai offers in her reading of black British feminism of the 1970s and the 1980s in the U.K. and Himani Bannerji models in her work on the construction of the Bengali gentlewoman in nineteenth-century colonial India.

The first part of de Lauretis's essay, which sets up the place *from where* she is writing, i.e. "feminist theory in the United States" offers a different kind of excitement to me, in its subtle, suggestive potential. Right at the beginning, she declares:

> Many who, like myself, have been involved with feminist critical theory for some time and who did use the term, initially, as a serious critical concept, have grown impatient with this word — essentialism — time and again repeated with its reductive ring, its self-righteous tone of superiority, its contempt for "them" — those guilty of it. Yet, as the title of this special issue may wish to suggest, feminist theory is all about an essential difference, an irreducible difference, though not a difference between man and woman, nor a difference inherent in "woman's nature" (in woman as nature), but a difference in the feminist conception of woman, women, and the world. (EoT 3)

Having launched that polemical projectile, de Lauretis settles down to the serious task of unraveling what this feminist difference constitutes and is constitutive of. Pinning down the "essential difference of feminism in its historical specificity," she goes back to John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*, where he spoke about the "unknown or unknowable" essence of a real entity, the "thing-in-itself," or in his quirky formulation, "The Essence of a Triangle, lies in a very little compass... three Lines meeting at three Angles, make up that Essence" (EoT 4, qtd. 5). Essence, for feminists, lies obviously not in any "*real essence*, in Locke's terms," as Fuss had also pointed out, "but more likely a nominal one" (EoT 5), what Spivak calls a strategic essentialism. This feminist difference obtains in a re-visioning that "already signals its historical location" and subsequently "projects itself outward geographically and temporally (universally) to recover the past and to claim the future" (ibid). As far as definitions of feminism go, this is one full of possibilities, *if taken seriously, rigorously.*

de Lauretis now goes on to discuss two Anglo-American feminists, Chris Weedon and Linda Alcoff, who each set up essentialism in the camp opposite to post-structuralism and cultural relativism. In their readings, the "crisis in feminism" is not only "a crisis *over* identity, a metacritical doubt and a dispute among feminists as to the notion of identity, but also a crisis *of* identity, of self-definition, implying a theoretical impasse for feminism as a whole" (EoT 10). This is certainly the way in which Susan Gubar and Robyn Wiegman envision their millennial essays, "What Ails Feminist Criticism?" and "Feminism's Apocalyptic Futures." de Lauretis's useful question for me is: "why is it still necessary to set up two opposing categories, cultural feminism and poststructuralism, or essentialism and anti-essentialism, thesis and antithesis, when one has already achieved the vantage point of a theoretical position that overtakes them or sublates them" in the understanding of gendered subjectivity as "an emergent property of a historicized experience" (EoT 12)? Why indeed?

The answer, I suggest, lies in what de Lauretis gestures towards but does not take to its logical conclusion. I suggest that in order to take the risk of essence seriously, we take the triangular structure of Locke's formulation at its face value. If the essence of a feminist conception of the world is taken to be *within the triangle*, then the first side of it is *history*, the second *geography*, and the last, an *embodied experience* in the locus of history and geography. de Lauretis certainly demonstrates the viability of this model in her specific analysis of Italian feminism, where gendered and sexed differentiation works in the flatlines of time and place, while at the same time reaching out to a horizon beyond them. I am interested, for the purposes of my dissertation, in how she conceives of this specificity. Notice that the 'nominal' essence she grants to her empirical example is *Italian feminism*. Temporality and spatiality come together in her wide conception of a feminist lifeworld *within* a geo-political boundary, while at the same time offering instructive exemplarity to other such realities. This is the missing link in Fuss's and Schor's work, as also in Spelman's. Because they take the 'fact' of *an* Anglo-American feminism that stands in its own vacuum, like a crop-circle emerged overnight in the field of social analysis, without any referent to other factors that might have defined, produced, influenced, transformed or interpellated it (except for the term 'difference'), they end up consigning to the dustbin of ineffectivity and invective the very essentialism they seek to revivify. Their feminisms stand not so much as examples to be employed *in service of the universal*, but *as* the very universal itself. This, despite the alternatives offered by contemporaneous U.S. third world feminism, the politics of location and feminist standpoint theory, which I *very* briefly take up in the next part.

Still Talking about Essentialism!:

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Sandoval offers precisely the kind of "genealogy of women" which can provide a "symbolic mediation between oneself and others, one's subjectivity and the world" that de Lauretis had argued for in her essay in *differences* (EoT 15); much closer to home than Italy, and not so symbolic either:

> The 1970s-80s social movement called U.S. third world feminism functioned as a central locus of possibility, an insurgent social movement that shattered the construction of any one ideology as the single most correct site where truth can be represented.... What U.S. third world feminism thus demanded was a new subjectivity, a political revision that denied any one ideology as the final answer, while instead positing a *tactical subjectivity* with the capacity to de- and re-center, given the forms of power to be moved. Sandoval 58.9

In fact, Sandoval cites de Lauretis amongst those "twentieth-century prophets" who "predicted a revolutionary form of human who rises from the ruins of previous social orders: from Fanon and Césaire to Bhabha and Said; from Haraway and de Lauretis to Anzaldúa and Lorde" (160). Unfortunately, there is no reverse flow of acknowledgment or accounting in de Lauretis's case (or by other feminists who take Western masculinist philosophy to be the grounds on which they must battle essentialism); she mentions two women of colour, Moraga and Lorde, by way of citing from Alcoff. On the one hand, these omissions signal the routine consignment of feminists of colour into 'pluralised and inchoate' groups of 'difference,' and on the other, they betray a lack of engagement with what feminists of colour might have to say about feminism 'proper'. Last, the question of who can talk about feminist essentialism continues to require legitimation on the terrain of universalist masculinist philosophy from which Western feminists have been traditionally excluded. Sandoval indicates that this might be why the model of U.S. third world feminism has not really made the kind of inroads into mainstream U.S. feminism as anticipated. She explains why "differential U.S. third world feminist criticism (which is a set of theoretical and methodological strategies) is often misrecognized and underanalyzed by readers when it is translated as a demographic constituency only (women of color), and not as a theoretical and methodological approach in its own right" (170.1):

> The textual problem that becomes the philosophical problem and, indeed, a political problem, is the conflation of U.S. third world feminist criticism — understood as theory and method of oppositional consciousness — with the demographic or "descriptive" and generalized category of "women of color," thus depoliticizing and repressing the specificity of the politics and form of consciousness developed by "U.S' women of color," or "feminists of color," and erasing the specificity of what is a particular form of these: "differential U.S. third world feminism." Sandoval 170.1

This disregard and discounting of differential methodologies is evident in the resurrection of the essentialism debate almost a decade after its heyday in Anglo-North American theory (for clues to what was happening in between, please check the appendix). I take up my last two examples, both from *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, which published discussion forums on two related subjects in 1997. The first is Susan Hekman's "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited" in the Winter issue, and the second, Rita Felski's "The Doxa of Difference" in the Autumn issue. Responses to Hekman came from Nancy M Hartsock, Patricia Hill Collins, Sandra Harding, Dorothy E Smith, all of whom Hekman had engaged with in her article and to whom she offers a rejoinder. Responses to Felski came from Rosi Braidotti, Drucilla Cornell and Ien Ang, accompanied by her rejoinder. Here I am interested not so much in the intricacies of their exchanges as in what they symptomatise about the state of current Anglo-American academic feminist theory: an overwhelming emphasis on 'difference' as the multicultural sidebar of feminism, distracting from the main course of gender essentialism as the *pièce de résistance* of feminist epistemology and its politics[23].

Susan Hekman's attribution of feminist standpoint theorisations to Nancy M Hartsock ostensibly seeks to appraise and situate it as a "paradigm shift in the concept of knowledge" (342). It goes on, however, to discredit it on several levels, the most significant being on the grounds that it "appears to be at odds with the issue that has dominated feminist debate in the past decade: difference" (ibid). Hekman contends feminist standpoint theory is "frequently regarded as a quaint relic of feminism's less sophisticated past," not the least because it is "opposed to two of the most significant influences in recent feminist theory: postmodernism and poststructuralism" (341, 342). She would like to see "how knowledge can be situated yet 'true,' and how we can acknowledge difference without obviating the possibility of critique and thus a viable feminist politics" (342). I am in no position to argue for or against Hekman because I have not engaged with feminist standpoint theory in any depth, but the 'we' of her essay rings alarm bells for all of her interlocutors. Hartsock accuses Hekman of reading "standpoint theories through a kind of American pluralism that prefers not to speak about power or justice but, rather, about knowledge and epistemology" (367). Hill Collins points out that by doing so, Hekman ignores "group history and location" at the expense of "individual perspective or point of view" (377, 376). Harding notes that "Hekman's account loses the point that standpoint epistemologies and methodologies were constructed in opposition to the all-powerful dictates of rationalist/empiricist epistemologies and methodologies (positivism) in the natural and social sciences and in public institutions such as the law, medicine, state economic policy, and so forth" (383). She charges that Hekman's "preoccupations with truth and reality" arise "only from the standpoint of a Eurocentric reaction to these postcolonial accounts," which thereby betray the defensiveness of an "administrator faced with managing all those culturally local people, with their conflicting perspectives, claims, and demands" (386, 387). Smith's response is the most biting; she locates the major problem of Hekman's interpretation in the "reification" of feminist standpoint theory, when in fact "as a general class of theory in feminism," it was brought into being by Harding's attempt "not to create a new theoretical enclave but to analyze the merits and problems of feminist theoretical work that sought a radical break with existing disciplines through locating knowledge or inquiry in women's standpoint or in women's experience" (392). Smith denies "proposing a *feminist standpoint* at all" and counterposes that "taking up women's standpoint" has nothing to do with "justifying feminist knowledge" (393).

I take up Smith's version of feminist standpoint theory in detail here as it provides an extremely nuanced understanding of difference. Instead of investing it with any ontological properties, she clarifies that "the category 'women' is peculiarly nonexclusive... and open-ended, such that boundaries established at any one point are subject to the disruption of women who *enter speaking from a different experience as well as an experience of difference*" (394, emphasis mine). This is a very important distinction, because difference here does not rest in any single static attribute, like skin colour, culture or what have you, but is locatable in specific socio-historical and geo-political factors that come together to enable moments of disruption in ideology. Smith also points out that "in the women's movement, some women have wanted to be able to go directly from what we know by virtue of how we participate in social relations to claims to knowledge at the level of a universalizing discourse" (395). She concludes that the critique of "essentialism" aims at this move and her aim instead has been to stress a "method of inquiry" (395, 396).

That the debate around essentialism circles again and again the wagon of 'difference' is evident in the forum on "The Doxa of Difference" where Rita Felski agrees that difference "has become a doxa, a magic word of theory and politics radiant with redemptive meanings" (1). She wants to instead "dislodge" the "narrative [of progress and of fall] of feminism's evolution from identity to difference," arguing that "the political interests and needs of women do not necessarily move in step with the various phases of academic feminist theory" (2). Having said this, however, she considers the "influential currents within contemporary feminist thought" to be "psychoanalytic theories of sexual difference as developed within feminist philosophy and analyses of cultural and material differences between women within postcolonial theory" (3). Note that discussions of "sexual difference" lie squarely within feminist *philosophy* (constituting a proper feminist identity), while postcolonial theory contains only *women* (reminding me of the title of a 2003 article by Uma Narayan, "What's a Brown Girl like You Doing in the Ivory Tower?: Or, How I Became a Feminist Philosopher"). This constant hopping from the category of 'women' out there in the world to proper 'feminists' in the academy to 'women' in postcolonial theory is the hallmark of theorists like Felski who continue to want to recuperate the concept of gendered essentialism in the interests of "the world's women." They return to the question of a 'real' feminist truth, method and epistemology that Hekman also raises.

The occasion of Felski's interest in gendered essentialism is the emergence of a "second generation" of sexual difference theorists, "exemplified by such figures as Rosi Braidotti, Drucilla Cornell and Elizabeth Grosz" (4). I won't take up Felski's discussion of these theorists, not because it is 'more of the same' theorisation of sexual difference, but because I am not *au courant* with their work. I will, however, attend to Felski's holding up of Ien Ang as an exemplary postcolonial critic who refuses to occupy the ground of a valourised difference because:

> As a woman of Chinese descent, I suddenly find myself in a position in which I can turn my 'difference' into intellectual and political capital, where 'white' feminists invite me to raise my 'voice' qua a nonwhite woman, and make myself heard. Ang qtd. Felski 11

Felski rightly points out that in this respect, "the field of postcolonial feminism is marked by an ongoing tension between the particular and the universal, between the 'thick description' of specific cultural practices and the macrosystemic analysis of transnational structures of inequality" (11). This characterisation of postcolonial feminisms becomes significant when we acknowledge that it is *not only* in the cultural specificities of 'their' differences that postcolonials are invested in; it is in the excavation of the very foundations of Western epistemology that consolidated itself *in dialogue and in tension with* its colonised peoples. Postcolonials have had to own and occupy the 'body' of Western philosophy, in both senses, and in equal measure, both within and against the grain. However, their 'white' peers and counterparts have not had to engage with these histories in the same way, leading to what Ang calls an "incommensurabilty," which is "the systemic consequence of a global historical development of the last 500 years" (Ang qtd. Felski 11). Felski objects to this incommensurability as it "does not allow for disagreement, critique, or persuasion because there are not common terms that would allow one argument to latch onto and address another" (13). She does recognize, however, that this is Ang's "strategic intervention into a specific debate, a provocation intended to startle white Western feminists out of arrogant assumptions about female commonality beyond racial and cultural difference" (14).

Ang's response to Felski is a fascinating exercise in *sidestepping* the question of feminism and feminist difference altogether. She explores instead "the tension between difference as benign diversity and difference as conflict, disruption, dissension" (Ang qtd. Felski 11). Her concerns are located in her own historic and geographic placement within Australia, where the "discursive recognition of incommensurability has been overwhelmingly empowering for indigenous people, as it is precisely the 'apparently impossible simultaneity' constructed by it that has turned the need for 'reconciliation' between indigenous and nonindigenous Australians into one of the most urgent and prominent issues in contemporary Australian national life" (62). An "acknowledgement of incommensurability does not have to result in political paralysis, but it can be the starting point for common political pursuits if we accept that politics does not have to be premised on the construction of a solid, unified 'we'... but on the very fragility, delicacy and uncertainty of any 'we' we forge" (61). In this context, Ang says, a necessary incommensurability implies that "because we are products of distinct, sometimes conflicting, *nonreconcilable but completely entangled histories*, the task of sorting our differences will always be a difficult, never-ending, and partial negotiatory process" (63, emphasis mine). In this negotiatory process, an asymmetric dispersal of knowledges is acutely at stake too. Ang argues that "the very meaning of 'reconciliation' is hotly contested and prone to incommensurability: its importance for indigenous Australians in their search for dignity and justice (the affective dimension of which may never be fully grasped by white Australians) is matched by its meaning as a political nuisance and economic liability by their opponents" (63). Thus how incommensurability is constructed, received and deployed by groups mediates Ang's engagement with the question of difference, where she takes her political examples from Australian social and national life in order to intervene in the feminist nation's quest for epistemological truth.

Incommensurability in relations between women from different places is replicated in incommensurabilities in the epistemology that is produced in women's name. This partial history of the discussion around essentialism will not be complete without the "autobiographical riff" that impels my interest in it (Frankenberg & Mani 279). In 2002, I presented on a panel on "Essentialism and Difference" at the *Third Wave Feminism* conference held at the University of Exeter, U.K. In that paper, I outlined the tentative ideas of this dissertation, in their unsophisticated, incipient stage no doubt. When some of the proceedings from this conference were published in *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* (eds. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford, Palgrave, 2004), I found one of my co-panelists included in the section on "Sex and Gender." The title of her presentation had been "Against Essentialism: Butler, Irigaray and the 'Genealogy of Woman,'" the published paper was "On the Genealogy of Women: A Defence of Anti-Essentialism". Other essays in this section were on topics ranging from Kristeva, male-embodied feminism, the transgender movement and on queering pornography. My conference paper, titled "Hotfooting Around Essentialism: Dancing with Difference," which I had changed to "Wa(i)ving it All Away: Producing Subject and Knowledge in Feminisms of Colour," was published in the section called "Challenges" and included papers on Muslim feminism, ecofeminism, postcolonial feminisms and transnational political economies. While this is extremely fine company for me to keep, and in fact at the conference it was with the writers of these papers that I established connections and had charged conversation, it does bother me that my paper, which argued that the "current trend of anti-essentialism merely re-inscribes the racist and ethnocentric assumptions of hegemonic feminist theorising," was not deemed 'fit and proper' to be included in the section which took up issues of essentialism (Chakraborty 214). In email exchanges with the editors of the volume, I had made a case for my essay to be included in that section, in order take seriously Winnie Woodhull's charge at the conference: the continuing ghettoisation of African and other Third World feminisms in "separate sessions at conferences, separate chapters in anthologies, separate and unequal agendas and activist efforts" (80). In the 2007 paperback print of this book, the editors asked me if I wanted to change anything, and I sent in a prefatory note detailing my concerns with their insistence on the wave-based model of hegemonic feminism and the way in which my article had been 'segregated' to the realm of challenges yet again. This time around, the collection of essays was divided into sections titled "Generations and Genealogies," "Locales and Locations," "Politics and Popular Culture" and "In Dialogue." My paper was printed without my prefatory note, in the second section, to provide some local colour no doubt, to relieve perhaps the hard task of the philosophical discussion that had taken place in the first section. Bitterness and other undesirable chip-on-the-shoulder-type affects notwithstanding, I have to wonder at the sole authorship and strangle-hold on 'philosophy' that hegemonic feminism continues to have. The question of genealogy, it seems to me, is intimately related to the question of epistemology. Where we as feminists take our place on the genealogical map of belonging, where we come from, then, has to take into consideration how we are produced too. In the last section of this introduction, I make a case for this 'where' to be the nation-state, which becomes a nominal essence around which feminists hotfoot.

In the Feminist Nation:

> Genealogy offers us a way into revealing the project of domination.
>
> Heidi Safia Mirza. *Black British Feminism* 5.

I was introduced to postcolonial studies during my M.Phil years at the University of Delhi, in a course titled "Comparative Literature and Literary Translation." This was immediately after I took a course on "Virginia Woolf in Context: Modernism, Feminism and Literary Theory." Both the courses were taught by Harish Trivedi, one of India's prominent postcolonial theorists: I mention this because this model of postcolonial studies seems particularly germane to me. Conceived in terms of an entry into modernity and its engagement with comparative literary-cultural models, this method has informed my doctoral work and my worldview. Recently, Spivak too has made the persuasive case for the resuscitation and renovation of the comparative studies model in *Death of a Discipline* (2003). I hope the comparative method has been evident in my analysis of essentialism so far.

Anyway, we started the Woolf course with her quotable quote from "Character in Fiction": "On or about December 1, 1910, human nature changed" (1). As Professor Trivedi pointed out, it was not 'character' but 'human nature' that had changed. As far as invitations go, this was a very seductive one for me/us: to join the mass of humanity that was already our collective modernity, to be transformed, to be connected to a larger vision of the world. Soon, I was even more exhilarated to learn that "as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (*Three Guineas*). In those early heydays of my youthful idealism and impassioned protest against the claims of patriarchy, of community, of nation, more liberatory words could not be found. But then, in another persuasive lecture, *A Room of Her Own*, Woolf argued for "democratization, education, and public professional activity" as the basis for transformative social change. This seemed an even more potent formula for a postcolonial nation that was still finding its feet, to which, as a young woman, I felt called to be a contributor.

It was not till seven years later that I read Adrienne Rich's "Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet" in *Selected Prose 1979-1985*. By this time, much had changed. I had moved continents, come out of a place I had started calling 'India' and had entered a space called 'Canada' where I was marked as an outsider and an alien. So when Rich said, "as a woman, I think it is essential that we admit and explore our cultural identities, our national identities, even as we reject the patriotism, jingoism, nationalism offered to us as 'the American way of life'" (183), it made perfect sense, especially in the PhD course on public feminisms I was now taking. In another essay that launched the idea of "a Politics of Location" in 1984, Rich is struck by her inability to speak of "the common oppression of women" and feels that "as a feminist who 'happened' to be a white United States citizen," she could not "divest" herself "of that country merely by condemning its government or by saying three times 'As a woman my country is the whole world'" (210, 212). She continues:

> Tribal loyalties aside, and even if nation-states are now just pretexts used by multinational conglomerates to serve their interests, I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create.

Serious and significant feminist critiques of the modern nation-state and nationalism notwithstanding[24], I am not the first scholar to notice the significance of such a place as an affective and defining one for feminists. As a postcolonial Indian feminist, I find myself both invested in my national identity and wanting to divest myself of the excesses of its nationalist and fundamentalist nation-building impulses. This is not surprising, given that for me, and for other subcontinentals, the idea of the nation-state has been bound up in the idea of the struggle against imperialism and for independence and self-governance[25]. The equation changes though when we arrive into spaces where our interest in these nationalist-feminist movements betokens a sign of our otherness and becomes a ruse for otherisation, where imperial tropes are continued and replicated. I am thinking not only of the arrival of subcontinental Indian postcolonial scholars in the space of the white-settler colony, but also into the spaces of academic and epistemological control, where we are created in particular ways. I am thinking of our negotiated arrival in the space of the feminist nation. Instead of granting "the thoroughly stratified larger theatre of the third World, the stage of so-called de-colonization, equal rights of historical, geographical, linguistic specificity and theoretical specificity" (ISD 238), our place in Anglo-American feminism is a special cultural zone[26] of difference from where we are allowed to only make 'specialised' area studies type claims, both of epistemology and of politics.

As Ien Ang says in the essay titled, "'I'm a Feminist but... 'Other' Women and Postnational Feminism," mainstream Western feminism operates like a nation with boundaries drawn and defined through the binaries of inclusion and exclusion, insider and outsider, citizenship and alien residentship. Just as the border patrol of white settler nation-states uses markers of race, religion, language, culture and other classifications based on the three-worlds theory to regulate and calibrate entry into their lands of opportunity, Ang contends that dominant white feminism uses the binary categories of theory and experience, method and knowledge, truth and politics, to gatekeep its hallowed portals. In this scenario,

> [N]on-white, non-Western women in "white/Western" societies can only begin to speak with a hesitating "I'm a feminist, but"... in which the meaning and substance of feminism itself becomes problematised. Where does this leave feminism? Feminism must stop conceiving itself as a nation, a 'natural' political destination for all women, no matter how multicultural. Rather than adopting a politics of inclusion (which is always ultimately based on a notion of commonality and community), it will have to develop a self-conscious politics of partiality, and imagine itself as a *limited* political home, which does not absorb difference within pre-given and predefined space but leaves room for ambivalence and ambiguity. (Ang 57-8; emphasis in original)

If Ang's plea is for hegemonic feminists to leave behind the 'home' of commonality and community, I have a different proposition. I would first like them to cede the ground of sexual differentiation as the criteria for eligibility and entry into the feminist nation. Second, I propose that they declare at the borders of the feminist nation where they are coming from, that they allow to be held up for scrutiny all the baggage and belongings that they have carted with themselves from the lands and places of their origin. Only then will there be something like a level-playing field for a discussion of feminist essentialism, where *all* entrants into the feminist field are "women marked by their origins" (*CPR* 262).

Daiva K Stasiulis, in the Canadian context, has also explained that the "ambiguous relationship between feminism and nationalism resides in the histories of relations between the two," which for many of us in the subcontinent was the making possible of "forms of activism for women which were previously impossible, and [which] simultaneously limited [our] horizons" (Hall qtd. Stasiulis 182). Stasiulis goes on to clarify that the "already ambiguous relationship between nationalism and feminism is further complicated by the reality of competing nationalist and nation-building projects mapped within the same geopolitical space" (182). So when the adjective 'Indian' marks my belonging to the geo-political sphere called the 'subcontinent,' I speak in the forked tongue of a feminist whose speaking position is defined by her location, while at the same time that she is attempting a critique of its patriarchal and other ideological structures. For example, Saadia Toor has done extensive work on what 'Indian' nationalism and nation-state has meant for Pakistan in the same geopolitical sphere. In such a case, it is not enough for me to point to the coalitional and collaborative work feminist members of the Progressive Writers Movements did at the time of independence, which was also when India and Pakistan got partitioned, followed by unspeakable violence on women's bodies on both sides of the borders.

This contestation between women's liberation movements and competing national/ethnic projects is evident within the structure of the hegemonic feminist nation. To cite Stasiulis again, it is important within all feminisms to necessarily develop a "conceptual apparatus that can analytically deal with not merely *plurality* but also and more important the *positionality* of different nationalisms, racisms, ethnocultural movements, and feminisms *in relation to one another*" (183). Here the dominant sexual differentiation model will not work, but as Sandoval, citing Donna Haraway, advocates, feminists need to be "less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness" and to instead become focused on *method*, on "gaining the INSURGENT ground as female social subject" (Haraway qtd. Sandoval 172.3, capitalisation in the original). Such a model was indeed offered in the 1980s in Anglo-American feminism:

> The 1970s-80s social movement called U.S. third world feminism functioned as a central locus of possibility, an insurgent social movement that shattered the construction of any one ideology as the single most correct site where truth can be represented.... What U.S. third world feminism thus demanded was a new subjectivity, a political revision that denied any one ideology as the final answer, while instead positing a *tactical subjectivity* with the capacity to de- and recenter, given the forms of power to be moved. Sandoval 58.9

What I like about Sandoval's model is that it is not an amorphous or all-encompassing theory that claims to represent the tactical subjectivity of *all* third world feminisms. Instead it is firmly rooted in and marked by the geo-political territory called the U.S.; it emerges from contingencies and insurgencies at a specific time in its turbulent history, the 1970s-80s.

I would like to bring back into focus the idea of the essence of the triangle that I left behind with de Lauretis two sections ago: geography, history and a feminist politics. I suggest that all feminisms take note of the national or location-specific prefix that determines their embodied emplacement in our fraught collectivity. This is even truer at this moment in history, when globalisation is purported to have made the whole world a smaller and more readily accessible place. In fact, national and geo-political borders have become even more impermeable and class considerations govern the mobility of populations everywhere. Radhika Mohanram too, in her important work on "blackness" as "a discursive practice exercised by the confluence of history, culture, economics, geography and language," suggests that 'place' understood in national, geo-political terms has a formative influence on identities (xii). In this new world order, the "continual recategorization" of migrant peoples "— from 'unmarked' to 'brown' to 'black' — goes beyond" a simple "classification of race" (Mohanram xii). The very terms that configure them in a racially hierarchised world "contain within them the social, economic and cultural history, as well as the markers of the places of domicile, of the subject" (ibid). I cite Mohanram in some detail here:

> It is a critical commonplace to suggest that in a postmodern, transnational theory-world, notions such as a 'pure' national or racial identity are anachronistic or outmoded concepts, since a postmodern understanding of identity is based on a comprehension of nation and race as arbitrary or with the landscape that surrounds them, a relationship which shapes their bodies and perceptions, forms their knowledge and informs their sense of aesthetics. Such an awareness suggests that place and landscape are not inert but things which actively participate in the identity formation of the individual. Not only does a sense of place participate in the construction of a perception of physical identity, it is also central to the formation of racial identity. The category of the 'black body' can come into being only when the body is perceived as being out of place, either from its natural environment or its national boundaries. (Mohanram xii).

Here, I want to take this 'out of place' experience further: to the place where the destabilisation of our ordered world can make possible an opportunity for some necessary self-scrutiny. Going back to the essence of the feminist triangle, I offer the third angle or line: once we have established our place and our positionality *in relation to* the geo-political and psychical constraints that determine them, it is time to start thinking about strategies to occupy the insurgent ground of politics. This last is the most difficult of all. This is the one that requires merciless scrutiny and self-examination of the ways in which all of us, in our geopolitical as well as feminist enclaves, have been essentially invested and complicitous in "the inherently exclusionary" and "antagonistic projects" of feminist and national "self-determination" (Stasiulis 182, 183). My discussion of the trans-Atlantic debate on essentialism has been impelled by my place in the multicultural white-settler nation-state as well as the feminist nation. I have danced around place in terms of my feminist affiliation and my postcolonial speaking position. To elaborate, I have been considering the question of place in feminism in two ways: 1) the geographical place from which I/we as postcolonial feminist/s speak, and 2) the theoretical place that I/we want to occupy within its epistemological/political parameters. However, at that historical moment in the 1980s, when debates around essentialism and difference were proliferating in the hegemonic feminist nation, there was very little interrogation of the place from where we, as postcolonial scholars, traced our genealogical and intellectual heritage. It is only with the further development of nationhood and subaltern studies that we have turned our eyes towards our historically inherited power as elite caste and class scholars in the academy.

For the constituencies of postcolonial, diasporic subcontinental feminists, the history of achieving independence from colonial rule and the development of self-governance on the basis of a national identity has made the category of national identification important for us. Discussions of essentialism in Anglo-North American settler-colonies have borrowed heavily from the pre-existing, pluralistic and place-specific hierarchies and constructions of race and colour. The term 'woman of colour' or "the *enunciative* function" of "blackness" emerges as "a discursive practice" in this context, "exercised by the confluence of history, culture, economics, geography and language" (Mohanram xiv, xii). But my interest cannot remain confined merely to excavating and excoriating the exclusionary practices of hegemonic feminism: I have to also be interested in the ways diasporic, subcontinental Indian scholars have used the term 'women of colour' to embrace an anti-racist agenda. Here some of us have engaged in a complicated, complex, and altogether convoluted dance around 'essentialism' that puts into question our very construction as racialised identities. Our motivations, intentions and complicities in occupying the place of the subaltern within the institution is surely a sign of our class interests too. An adoption of *just a* racialised identity has obscured our other substantial histories and made opaque the relation between our multiple class identities and our anti-colonial politics. In my reading, the work of postcolonial theorists is influenced much more by immigration policies of modern, multicultural, white settler countries. Our two-fold response is aimed both at the racist policies of the nation-state as well as at the differentiating politics of a dominant nation of feminism.

Sara Ahmed invokes the idea of "inter-embodiment as a site of differentiation rather than inclusion: in such an approach, 'my body,' and 'the other body' would not be structurally equivalent, but in a relation of asymmetry and potential violence" (48). The relation of asymmetry Ahmed makes is between those bodies that are assumed to 'naturally' and 'normally' belong to any given social space or 'neighbourhood' (she uses the word neighbourhood to suggest sociality and relations of exchange) and those that are seen as aliens, strangers and foreigners to it. She disagrees that the difference is indicated *on* the body of the stranger, but argues that "bodies that cannot be assimilated into a given space are, in some sense, already read and recognizable through the histories of determination in which such bodies are associated with dirt and danger" (50-51). There are two problems with this supposition. One, the gaze of this assumption is always taken to be the dominant history, as if the histories of the other are also not prescriptive and determinant in any way. As if those who are 'read and recognised' do not also gaze back and invent parallel, binary narratives of contamination, pollution and untouchability. Two, what of bodies that are assumed to be part of the 'neighbourhood'? To be precise, those who are taken to be, read and marked as 'women of colour' are all assumed to be part of the same neighbourhood. But in white settler colonies, these differentiated and marked bodies are as diverse from each other as they are from the dominant majority. Sharing only a common history of colonisation and oppression does not reduce the immense geographical and historical distances they have to travel in order to come to live in this same neighbourhood.

Here we must be cautioned by Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's early travel advisory in their essay "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do With It?" where they argue for all narratives of feminism to be politicised by "geography, demography, and architecture of these communities" (195). If we do not heed this caution, we end up having the same potential for violence and blindness to a situated history that marks these bodies differently. This dissertation is about the relationality of that difference and for the acknowledgement of power differentials operative within the larger pluralistic construct of difference. Only if we remain congnisant of these differentials can we hotfoot around an identity that speaks to our most immediate and urgent tropes of interembodiment.

Endnotes

[1] I say this despite the overwhelming and enabling influence of Chicana critics in my dissertation: I understand Chicana feminism as the result of Mexico's border-politics and the politics of multi-national and globalised industry *within* the U.S.

[2] Throughout the dissertation, I refer to feminisms bound by the geo-political spheres of English-speaking Canada and the United States of America as Anglo-North American feminisms. This is to locate it within the larger, trans-Atlantic field of Anglo-American feminisms, which includes scholarship from Great Britain and Ireland, and also engagements with French feminism. When I refer to Euro-American feminism, I mean only French feminism here; contemporary feminist ferment in the rest of Europe does not come under the purview of this dissertation. Anglophone feminists from Australia and New Zealand share some common, white-settler colony strands with Anglo-American feminism. Postcolonial feminisms are engaged with Anglo-American feminism through networks of neo-/colonialism, migration and settlement, but also refer to feminist activity in their nations of origin and in area-studies type configurations (e.g. Egyptian or Iranian or Korean or Sudanese feminism).

[3] I use the cricket metaphor in slight jest, keeping in mind the latest triumphalist postcolonial Bombay cinema production, *Lagaan* (2001), which shows the tables, or rather the wickets being turned on the colonial masters who taught illiterate natives to play cricket, that ultimate English gentleman's game. *Lagaan* was nominated in the Best Foreign Film category at the populist Academy Awards.

[4] Interestingly, 'essentialism' does not seem to cause as much *angst* in ethnic and diaspora or area studies literatures, where questions of identity and being might

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be assumed to have equal importance. It does have salience in lesbian, gay and transgender studies, where the 'body' again is in question, as also for 'people of colour' identities. 'Black' here is an interesting slot, playing on blood/skin/body as well as heritage and history. Of course, none of these categories are airtight, but intermediated by complex and continuous negotiations by the subjects who occupy them.

[5] See S Sayyid's "Bad faith: anti-essentialism, universalism and Islamism." and Teresa de Lauretis's "Upping the Anti(sic) in Feminist Theory."

[6] Sandoval acknowledges Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's characterisation of this women's history as "hegemonic feminist theory" in "The Rani of Sirmur" in Francis Barker ed. *Europe and its Others*, 1985 (147).

[7] See Ranu Samantrai's wonderful historical survey of the "black British (African Caribbean and South Asian) feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s" as an example of the "practical politics" of dissent by "those who refuse to remain under erasure, in *AlterNatives: Black Feminism in the Postimperial Nation* (1). Samantrai offers this as a particularly "instructive" model of "an aesthetic of conflict" because "it was founded on conflict and was consistently troubled by the dissent of its own affiliates" and therefore exemplified "a paradoxical practice of seeking racial and gender equality while interrogating the salience of race and gender as markers of similitude and difference" (ibid). See Wini Breines too.

[8] Postcolonial histories consist both of the pre-colonisation specificities of these geographical locations as well as an inhabitation of and engagement with the landscape of the colonial metropolis and its administrative, bureaucratic, cultural, epistemological, ideological and literary imaginaries. It is well known

that developments in the margins transformed the culture and relations of ruling in the metropolis too. Postcolonial scholars thus straddle, with some felicity, many pre-colonial, colonial and anti-colonial archives. I am aware here that I am re-inscribing one of the constantly criticised tenets of postcolonial studies: that of making the moment of colonialism the definitive one for histories of colonised regions and peoples, a before and an after so to speak.

[9] Derived from the Indian epic, *Ramayana, laxman rekha* is the boundary line drawn by Laxman, Rama's brother, to prevent Sita, Rama's wife, to fall into the dangers of the world. Sita can cross the line drawn at the threshold of their abode only at her physical and mor(t)al peril. She does imperil the entire community as her transgression in stepping over it leads to the epic battle between Rama and King Ravana, Sita's abductor. The story has obvious racial/national undertones, as Rama is descended from the Aryans and Ravana, the Dravidians. Later in the narrative, Sita has to prove her chastity and purity by undergoing *agni-pariksha*, i.e. the test by fire (this is a feminist reading). Kambar's revisionist *Ramayana* is told from the Southern perspective. "In modern Indian parlance, [laxman rekha] refers to a strict convention or a rule, never to be broken. It often refers to the ethical limits of an action, traversing which may lead to undesirable consequences" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lakshman_Rekha)

[10] Reference to Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan's edited collection: *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992.

[11] I was guided to this "handy definition of essentialism" by Spivak's footnote 1 in "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" (238).

[12] The discussion of the future of feminism has acquired something of an obsessional status amongst academic feminists of a certain stripe. While they are

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often described in pejoratively generational terms, I think what is really at stake is their continued investment in the 'proper' subject of feminism being a gendered body *to the exclusion of other kinds of essential and affective belongings*. See the recent symposium on "Feminist Criticism Today" (in memory of Nellie Y McKay) in *PMLA*. 121: 5, October 2006. This includes position papers by Toril Moi, Susan Gubar and Susan Stanford Friedman on recuperating gender as the foundational rock of feminist criticism. See also the millennial stock-taking prescriptions and predictions by Susan Gubar, Robyn Wiegman, Wendy Brown and Judith Butler.

[13] I would also like to note that the term 'feminism' does not appear in Williams' *Keywords*, but is implied through the words sex-abolitionists and sex-privilege under the entry on **Sex** (284).

[14] Linda Gordon in an article titled "On 'Difference'" in *Genders* (1991) attests that difference "gained particular influence in women's studies through its theoretical development by literary critics," in "gynocritical" approaches to writing in the U.S. and in the French feminists' engagement with "psychoanalytic thought and their closer experiences both with communism and with Nazism" (93). Elaine Marks explains the difference as follows: "We (American feminists) raise consciousness by speaking to and working with each other; they (French feminists) explore the unconscious by writing." (qtd. Alice Jardine, "Prelude," *The Future of Difference*. xxvi)

[15] Even twenty years later, in a symposium on "Feminist Criticism Today" in the *PMLA*, Moi bemoans how "Feminism Became the F-Word" by exploring only the relations between men and women, with no recognition of its other 'essentialist' challengers. In this 2006 article, Moi's emphasis on the heterosexual contract

between men and women becomes the center-piece of her doomsday prediction about the (singular) future of feminism.

[16] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (1992) and *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (1998), and Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon's *Women Writing Culture* (1995) are important contributions to the question of women and of colonised people's use of the autobiographical method to establish their subjectivity and authorship over their own epistemologies and identities.

[17] If there was only one essay each that a contemporary theorist 'must read' as representative and explanatory of U.S. third world feminism and postcolonial feminism, it would have to be Chela Sandoval's "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World" published in *Genders* in 1983, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" published in the *Oxford Literary Review* in 1986. Each essay is an authoritative, uncompromising, and poetic treatise on the historical and sociological complexity of 1980s Anglo-North American feminism. They contain the insights we trade in as the currency of contemporary feminist theory.

[18] Trinh cites Spivak's essay "The Politics of Interpretation" from a special issue on the topic brought out by *Critical Inquiry* in 1982, which itself is an important year in literary feminist history, where the previous issue was on "Writing and Sexual Difference" edited by Elizabeth Abel.

[19] The first issue of the newly-launched journal was on "Life and death in sexuality: reproductive technologies and AIDS" in Winter 1989 and the third issue on "Male subjectivity" in Fall 1989.

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[20] Spivak says in this interview to Ellen Rooney: "What I am very suspicious of is how anti-essentialism, really more than essentialism, is allowing women to call names and congratulate themselves" (128-129).

[21] Spelman explains that "somatophobia" i.e. "fear of and disdain for the body" is an intrinsic part of a "centuries long tradition in Western culture... [where] the responsibility for being embodied creatures has been assigned to women...; men (or some men) have been associated and virtually identified with the mind" (*IE* 126-127).

[22] Here I would like to very strongly clarify that the Enlightenment is not questionable in itself; in fact we in modernity are still working through the strides made in human knowledge during the Enlightenment. However, to echo Fuss's refrain, we need to question how, why and by whom the discourse of Enlightenment is deployed and to what effect. Pedagogically this is a challenge for postcolonial theorists because we cannot teach students to read *against* the grain *before* we have taught them to read in/with the grain. Institutional oppositionality for the sake of opposition, rather than with a genuine curiosity about what it is that the Enlightenment meant, has led to some of the recurring pitfalls of postcolonial studies in the Anglo-American context. Ania Loomba has suggested that the only 'true' postcolonials left in the world are students of English literature in India who continue to be taught to read it at face value. This, in my opinion, is not a bad thing, if we accept that the Enlightenment is one of the major social movements of the world and deserves to be engaged with, *along with* the other great movements of the world. The last part of the agenda is of course not followed in the metropolis with any rigour, and leads to the kinds of asymmetrical knowledge structures that Dipesh Chakraborty warns us about.

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[23] In fact, this is the reason Spivak has enjoyed such spectacular success in her engagement with U.S. feminism: she has been able to own and stake her flag to the (costly) playing field of European Enlightenment and play the game on its own terms. While she has also compelled the change in the rules of engagement in the game, it is no surprise that the radical suggestions of her formulations have not won her any friends either in the inner courts or its margins.

[24] By now of course I am familiar with many postcolonial critiques of nationalism, notably Kumari Jayawardena's *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London Zed Books, 1986), Ruth Roach Pierson & Nupur Chaudhuri, eds. *Nation, Empire. Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), Norma Alarçon, Caren Kaplan & Minoo Moallem, eds. *Between Home and Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), Himani Bannerji, Shahrzad Mojab & Judith Whitehead, eds. *Of Property and Propriety: The Role of Gender and Class in Imperialism and Nationalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) etc.

[25] My/our production as a member/s of the educated middle-class section of society was aided by the nuanced Marxist readings of how 'India' came into being as a socialist, secular, democratic republic, characteristics enshrined in our constitution and repeated *ad nauseam* in our 'Civics' and 'Social Studies' classes. A gendered analysis of the nation state became important only later, when other integers gained prominence in the map of the world we devised for ourselves.

[26] Like the special economic zones created in countries like India for the relentless march of global capitalism, and the Special Administrative Zone of Hong Kong after its 'transfer' from British hands into Chinese ones.

Appendix on Essentialism

Flashpoints of the debate on essentialism and difference:

1980: Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine edit *The Future of Difference*. (proceedings of "The scholar and the feminist VI: the future of difference" conference at Barnard College Women's Centre, New York City, 29th April, 1979)

1981: Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa edit *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour*.

- Third Annual Conference of the NWSA, National Women's Studies Association in Storrs, Connecticut, theme: "Women Respond to Racism," June. Chela Sandoval writes an incisive report on it.
- Elizabeth Abel edits special issue of *Critical Inquiry* on "Writing and Sexual Difference" following a symposium on "The Politics of Interpretation" (another special issue of *Critical Inquiry*) that includes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward Said as 'Third World" representatives.

1982: Gloria T Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith bring out *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*.

1983: Ann Russo, Lourdes Torrres and Chandra Talpade Mohanty organise the "Common Differences: Third World Women and Feminist Perspectives" conference at Urbana-Champaign in April, which leads to the articulation of a third world feminist politics of location.

- Nancy Hartsock publishes *Money, Sex, and Power*, which is associated with feminist standpoint theory.
- *Displacement: Derrida and After*, an edited book collection that includes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman"
- Chela Sandoval publishes "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World." *Genders*. 10, 1991. 1-24.

1984: Adrienne Rich's "Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet" and "Notes toward a Politics of Location" (published in 1986).

- Ranajit Guha edits *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*.

- Elizabeth Grosz interviews Spivak at Futur*Fall, a conference on Postmodernity in Sydney, where Spivak agrees that "it's absolutely on target to take a stand against the discourse of essentialism, universalism as it comes in the terms of the universal.... But *strategically* we cannot" (Sarah Harasym ed. *The Postcolonial Critic* 11).

1985: *Critical Inquiry* brings out special issue on "'Race,' Writing, and Difference" in Autumn, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. It includes essays by Edward Said, Abdul Jan Mohammed, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Jacques Derrida with Peggy Kamuf.

- Toril Moi publishes *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory.*
- Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn co-edit *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism.*
- Elaine Showalter publishes *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory.*

1986: The *Oxford Literary Review* brings out a special issue on "Sexual Difference" edited by Robert Young, including Toril Moi's "Existentialism and Feminism: the Rhetoric of Biology in the Second Sex" and Spivak's "Imperialism and Sexual Difference."

- Teresa de Lauretis edits *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* which includes Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's famous essay, "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?"

1987: *Feminist Review* in Spring publishes Trinh T Minh-ha's "Difference: 'A Special Third World Women Issue'" followed in the Summer issue by Michèle Barrett's "The Concept of 'Difference.'"

1988: Elizabeth V Spelman publishes *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, the changed title of what was previously to be *Out of Their Minds: Philosophers on Women, Slaves, Emotions and the Body*, signaling the importance the terms 'essential' and 'exclusion' had acquired in feminism.

1989: Diana Fuss publishes *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference.*

- Trinh T Minh-ha publishes *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism.*

- Cynthia Enloe publishes *Bananas, Beaches & Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics.*
- *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* is launched. The second issue is themed on essentialism and includes essays by Teresa de Lauretis, Naomi Schor, Luce Irigaray, Diana Fuss and the famous Spivak interview with Ellen Rooney in which she revises her idea of strategic essentialism.
- *Inscriptions* brings out a special issue on "Traveling Theories/Traveling Theorists" edited by James Clifford and Vivek Dhareshwar. It includes Elizabeth Grosz's "Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism," Mary E John's "Postcolonial Feminists in the Western Intellectual Field: Anthropologists and Native Informants," Vicki Kirby's "Corporeographies" and Lata Mani's "Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multinational Reception."

1990: Teresa de Lauretis publishes a revised version of the *differences* essay in the light of Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller's edited collection on *Conflicts in Feminism.*

- Linda J Nicholson edits *Feminism/Postmodernism.*

1991: *Hypatia* brings out a special issue on "Feminism and the Body" including Vicki Kirby's "Corporeal Habits: Addressing Essentialism Differently."

- Joan Scott's "The Evidence of Experience" appears in *Critical Inquiry.*

1992: *Hypatia* brings out a special issue on "Lesbian Philosophy."

- Judith Butler and Joan W Scott edit *Feminists Theorize the Political.*

1993: Jenny Sharpe publishes *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of the Woman in the Colonial Text.*

1994: Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed edit *The Essential Difference*, a reprint of the 1989 *differences* issue.

1997: *Signs: Journal of Woman and Culture* hosts a discussion forum on Susan Hekman's "Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited" in the Winter issue and on Rita Felski's "The Doxa of Difference" in the Autumn issue.

The big gap in this list is Judith Butler's work, which I have resisted reading, not due to a lack of trying. This resistance I will call a 'politics of taking against' a text (like I did with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* and initially with the novels of Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai and Monica Ali). Partly the resistance is a self-defensive gesture against which one's sense of ignorance and inadequacy are shored up. Partly it is the misplaced arrogance that one knows better. Partly it is against the hype that surrounds a work. I admit that all gestures are self-defeating in the long run. There has never been a time when I approached a text with my guard down, with good-will and grace to encounter it on its own terms and was not rewarded. I have found through serves-me-right experience that the hype exists because the work does possess the virtues that a large number of readers find interesting or useful or both. Last, as my second reader pointed out, texts find us when we are ready. The lovely surprise of discovery that accompanies the proving wrong of one's presumptions and the overcoming of one's prejudice is the reward of engaging with the work. The ambitious post-dissertation aim of this work is to fill the gap.

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OUTSIDE *in* THE HOUSE OF COLOUR

a second look at postcolonial and transnational feminisms via Chandra Talpade Mohanty

> Here in America, where every nationality confirmed its stereotype—
>
> Kiran Desai *The Inheritance of Loss* 23.

> To privilege the racial body in the absence of historical context is indeed to generate an idiom that tends to waver with impressionistic haste between the abstractions of postcoloniality and the anecdotal literalism of what it means to articulate an "identity" for a woman writer of colour.
>
> Sara Suleri "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition" 762.

I start with these two quotations as they inform my understanding of the twin strands of race and nation that bind postcolonial feminisms in the contemporary Anglo-North American academy. This chapter traces the evolution of postcolonial feminism from its situated, located, 'third world' avatar to its free-floating reincarnation as transnational feminism in the age of mobility and identity. In this essay, I focus on the first generation of scholars and feminists of South-Asian origin who made their mark on postcolonial theory in the Anglo-North American academy circa the 1970s. Using Chandra Talpade Mohanty as a time-specific case-study, I examine how the terms 'woman of colour' and 'third world woman' have been taken up by, and circulate amongst, this group. I argue that this group of *extra*-national[1], third world intellectuals is to be distinguished from their peers, i.e. other U.S.-based scholars who answer to and self-identify with the identity and political label 'woman of color.'

This essay interrogates the particular kinds of essentialisms that South Asian postcolonial feminists entertain when they inhabit analytic categories like 'third world woman' and 'woman of colour.' I hold that the paths of inquiry influenced by colonial discourse analysis, national and post-/independence narratives, postcolonial and transnational theories, (which depend on epistemologies of imperialism, nationhood, modernity and the flow of global capital — human, cultural, economic, intellectual) are more conducive to *their* theorizing, than when they occupy historically *specific* and geographically *located* categories of coloured and racialised *American* identity. Mine is a modest proposal: I argue that claiming the territory and terminology of 'colour' dilutes the force of postcolonial narration for South Asian scholars and elides or eclipses their particular projects of knowledge making in the Anglo-North American academy. More to the point, such a claim obfuscates the historical and geographical specificities of both the terms 'third world woman' and 'woman of colour' thereby confusing the trajectories of politics and identity for both their constituencies. The broad mandate of postcolonial feminism (currently moving into transnationalism) is a distinct one that cannot be conflated either with feminisms of colour or critical race theory, despite congruence in their aims. In order to emphasise their locational specificities, and read each project in relation to its own *place*, i.e. geographical site as well as intellectual field, I situate Mohanty's work on 'third world woman' with respect to Gloria E Anzaldúa's ground-breaking work on 'women of colour' as showcased in three anthologies by radical women of colour. These two theorists provide my genealogical paths of entry into the categories 'third world feminism' and 'feminisms of colour' respectively.

In my reading, the two terms develop contemporaneously in the U.S. academy, during and after the Civil Rights Movements and the social movements of the third world which are linked to regional independence and cooperation and in non-alignment with the Cold War. Juxtaposing conceptions of postcolonial national belonging and third world affiliation with racialised identity, I question the *primacy* of 'race' (as defined in American discourses of immigration – forced and settlement-related — and naturalization) and the deployment of the term 'woman of colour' as an appropriate analytical vehicle for the dispensation of South Asian *postcolonial* feminist concerns in the force-field of U.S. academe. This chapter is divided into two main sections: the first is a partial account of twentieth-century Asian immigration in the U.S. to show how the American discourse of race is intimately meshed with its national and foreign diplomacy policies, and the second is a critique of Mohanty's analysis of 'third world woman' as an interpretive frame and oppositional standpoint that brings together postcolonial concerns with the concerns of people of colour in the U.S. In order to understand how 'third world women' relate to the category 'woman of colour,' the second part also looks at the circulation of the terms and the constituencies interpellated and affected by them in the U.S. academy, mainly using the anthologising activism of Gloria Anzaldúa in three collections, the first trail-blazing one co-edited with Cherríe Moraga in 1981, one edited just by herself in 1990, and the last co-edited commemorative collection with AnaLouise Keating in 2002. The bridge linking the two parts of this chapter is the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that made possible the entry of an entire generation of third world scholars like Mohanty into the U.S. academy.

My engagement with Mohanty is a *productive* disagreement; her critical intervention in U.S. feminist scholarship circa the 1980s and its continuing influence today offers me a more vigorous mode of thinking about contemporary feminist identity and politics. Her arguments are the launching point for my critique; my aim is to broaden the debate around third world feminists who perceive themselves as hailed by the category 'women of colour'. It is in the project of thinking *against the grain* of 'woman of colour' feminisms, specifically for postcolonial South Asian scholars, that I find Mohanty's work so generative of thought. This chapter is also a response to some recent demands made by feminists of colour and critical race theorists that postcolonial scholarship *must* address race as a central constituent of contemporary identity[2]. While impatient with the last stance, and trying to arrive at a geo-historically nuanced understanding of how scholarship functions in an academy permeated by the discourse of race, I nevertheless intend my analysis to be exploratory and non-conclusive.

My tone in some sections of this essay is at times exasperated and reactive: as a self-identified Indian scholar of English literature trained in the canon, in colonial discourse analyses and postcolonial theorisations, I find myself fighting against the identity label 'woman of colour' much *more* than 'third world woman' even as I affiliate myself politically with the former and question the latter in the pursuit of higher education (in the Canadian university system). The first to me is an identity category marked by non-normative 'visibility' (skin colour, sartorial codes, speech accents, self-identification) and a consciousness of oneself as a racialised body in the multicultural space of white-settler colonies. The second is a political and affective affiliation to a geographical territory marked by nineteenth-century imperialism and non-alignment with the cold war division of the globe into the first, second and third worlds. In this space, considerations of race are not absent, but mediated in contradictory and complex ways with older histories and newer divisions of power. While both are discursive categories, the ways in which they are deployed attests to the continuing contestation between identity and epistemology in U.S. academic politics, a contestation in which it becomes hard for 'marked' bodies to resist the conflicting calls of ethical affiliations and affective alignments, of what may be called the 'being' and 'belonging' of politics.

My struggle is also influenced by the powerful and persuasive *promise* of solidarity that feminisms of colour offer to South Asian postcolonial feminisms, twenty-five years after these terms first emerged[3]. In this, I echo Mohanty when she says in a semi-autobiographical essay titled "Crafting Feminist Genealogies: On the Geography and Politics of Home, Nation, and Community" (referred to as "Crafting" hereafter) that "politically, intellectually, and emotionally, I owe an enormous debt to feminists of colour" (491). Like Mohanty, I too trace my journey into academic feminism via "U.S. women of colour and Third World women, [who] spoke to me" (ibid). I do not deny at all that the aims of these two streams of theorisation often run parallel and seek to (re-)address the domination of an ever-changing dynamic of white power and privilege in Anglo-North America. I remain convinced though, of the utter necessity of geographically-aware historical differentiation of political imaginaries.

Rigorous South Asian postcolonial feminist scholarship has consistently argued for an acute self-reflexivity in order to precisely re-engage with that promise of solidarity, while reminding us of the pitfalls of *just* solidarity on the grounds of identity. I am thinking of the work of scholars like Inderpal Grewal, Kumari Jayawardena, Mary E John, Lata Mani, Radhika Mohanram, Uma Narayan, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sara Suleri and Kamala Visweswaran in particular. Mohanty professes to prefer the adjective 'third world' to 'postcolonial' on the grounds that the former addresses the constituencies of both first and third world nations that have been "deformed" by imperialism and because it "foregrounds a history of colonization and contemporary relationships of structural domination between first and third world peoples" (*TWW* x). While I agree with this characterisation, I do not think that third world feminists in the U.S. academy can claim the same status as those purported to be living 'third world lives' in the first world American nation. As Vilashini Cooppan argues, the "internal colonialism" thesis of the 1960s and '70s and "its attendant cultural nationalism cannot account for divisions of class within minority communities, inter-minority group rivalries, or the interpenetration of minority and dominant cultures" (10)[4]. For me, the 'third world' is a very particular geo-political imaginary and as academics from those sites, we cannot *not be* more cognisant of the privileges that attend our entry into the enormously powerful hegemonic U.S. university system. Existence in academe *already* presupposes class privilege, a privilege that is not simply connected to one's bank account but carries with it the burden of cultural capital and assumes a historically wrought 'right' to knowledge production. Even if Mohanty *chooses* to privilege the 'third world' aspect of her work, I argue that she owes much more to her inheritance as the citizen of a secular, postcolonial nation and as a privileged member of the "absent elite" from that nation ("Crafting" 493)[5].

The work of South Asian postcolonial feminist scholarship is not the same as the work of feminisms of colour: this statement bears repetition simply because it has been said so many times before and yet continues not to be heard, as noted above. The first has to do with the academic theorisations of informed postcolonial, postnational and third world issues and the second with American local and national concerns, even though both come to prominence in the hegemonic U.S. academy. Transnational studies as the logical successor to postcolonial scholarship deserves a little footnote here; I quote Mohanty from "Crafting" again:

> Globalization — or, the unfettered mobility of capital and the accompanying erosion and reconstitution of local and national economic and political resources, and of democratic processes; the post-cold war U.S. imperialist state; and the trajectories of identity-based social movements in the 1980s and 1990s — constitutes the ground for transnational feminist engagement as we approach the twenty-first century. Multicultural feminism that is radical, anti-racist, and non-heterosexist thus needs to take on a hegemonic capitalist regime and conceive of itself as also crossing national and regional borders. (495)

While much about globalisation is valid here, I argue that transnational academic practice too assumes privileged "mobilities of education" that need to be acknowledged. Thus I argue for the critical *co-existence* and historical validation of postcolonial and transnational scholarship *in dialogue with* scholarship on colour and critical race theory, rather than the commingling and compounding of two differently inflected and oriented methodologies of knowledge production.

PART ONE: The Lay of the Land

*Term*inal Trouble: a somewhat long, rambling, selective and necessary history of race consciousness and racial categories in the U.S. in the twentieth century:

Postcolonial feminisms from South Asia, in both their third world and transnational forms, are not to be confused with the project of women of colour in the American nation. The former belong to an economically and educationally privileged, post-1965 migration group from erstwhile third world and now global South countries, whose history of consciousness and identity formation is derived from its origin in a post-Independence, postcolonial Indian subcontinent and its diasporas, as well as its journey of immigration and settlement in the U.S. I take up the inception and operation of 'woman of colour' feminisms in the section on Anzaldúa, but here I want to touch briefly upon postcolonialism. Broadly speaking, its mandate is the analyses of nineteenth-century imperial discourses and Eurocentric assumptions, as also the excavation of projects of national, subaltern and diasporic identity. Postcolonial scholarship arrives and consolidates its position in the U.S. academy circa the 1970s with the arrival of third world intellectuals in "'our' contemporary metropolis" after "the dwarfing of Britain" as the colonial centre (John 11). It coincides with the ascendancy of 'theory' and specifically with those theorisings that have now "acquired a metadisciplinary universal status: poststructuralism, feminism, semiotics, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, and continental philosophy" (John 29). Postcolonial studies in particular is interested in the politics of epistemology, institutional privilege and the narratives of representation of the Other under the sign of the West.

Postcolonial South Asian scholars do not have the same status as their African-American or Hispanic peers in the American nation's history of racial discrimination and segregation, a project of social stratification based on continually shifting colour lines *in* the West. The former derive a sense of self and identity from their own histories of hierarchy based on caste and class in their nations of origin (mythical or physical) and any parallel *sensibility* and *sympathy* they might profess with histories of racialisation in the U.S. is a *politicised*, not natural or automatic, effect and function of immigration. However 'Other' it might be made through the 'common sense' logic, the everyday practices and institutionalised technology of race[6] in the U.S., this group does not have the same 'race memory' or 'racial history' that older racialised groups like the African-Americans and Hispanics have. In fact, any consciousness of race it may have is defined by its highly suspect relationship to a mythical Aryan-ness and its indigenous opposite in a Dravidian ancestry or an equally spurious anthropologically determined Caucasian-ness[7] distilled in subcontinental Indian imagination. If this argument sounds like the setting up of a stratification of racialisation, I contend that indeed such a hierarchy operates in a divisive, elusive, continually transforming and hydra-headed politics and project of 'race' itself in the American nation. Let me expand on this complex and complicated history somewhat. I was tipped off on the peculiarities of South Asian immigration to the U.S. and their racial classification by a paper titled "What do South Asians and Vampires have in Common?" at the *ERA21: EndRacism: Activism for the 21st Century* conference in Vancouver in 2000, where I heard for the first time that South Asians were actually deemed 'white' at one stage of immigration in the U.S. Most of the information that follows is derived from *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* and *Asian.Nation*, two non-refereed web-based sources, but I propose to do some statistical research in the U.S. Census Bureau and Immigration and Naturalization Services archives at a later stage to prop up these claims. At the moment, they operate as hearsay and collective community knowledge.

In 1965, American President Lyndon B Johnson signed into law the Immigration and Nationality Act amendments proposed by Emanuel Cellar and supported by Senator Ted Kennedy, who favoured immigration based on "skills," "contribution" and "close relationship to those already here" as guarantors of entry, settlement and naturalization in the U.S. (Johnson). This Act abolished the national origin quotas that had been in place in the U.S. since the Immigration Act of 1924, also known as the Asian Exclusion Act or Johnson-Reed Act. The 1924 National Origins Act had barred specific origins from the Asia-Pacific triangle, which included Japan, China, the Philippines, Laos, Siam, Cambodia, Singapore, Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Burma, India, Ceylon and Malaysia, on the eugenicist grounds that these were an "undesirable race," to uphold an ethnic status quo and curtail competition between the 'white' races and foreign workers. In 1946, the Luce-Cellar Act granted naturalization rights to Indians and Filipinos, previously regarded as inassimilable. The real change in immigration numbers came with the 1965 amendments, which were influenced by the Civil Rights Movement. They opened up hitherto-restricted migration from the Asia-Pacific Rim, the unprecedented effect of which the Act did not anticipate even in President Lyndon B Johnson's signing speech. To quote him:

> This bill that we sign today is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the life of millions. It will not reshape the structure of our daily lives, or really add importantly to either our wealth or our power. (Johnson)

As we know, the 1965 INS Act changed the face of the U.S., making it a multiethnic, multicultural nation with the flourish of a single signature. So post-1965 immigration was a watershed moment in the history of foreign presence in the U.S., a moment that is reflected in the enormous transformations in the institutional culture and social fabric of the U.S. That it had a direct effect on academic scholarship is often overlooked.

Pre-1965, the American nation was racially divided into 89% 'whites' of European descent, with the only significant minority being the 10% 'indigenous' blacks, i.e. descendants and bearers of the legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as opposed to immigrants from Africa. Today, immigrants from the Asia-Pacific Rim constitute the third most significant and influential minority group (only at 5%), after Hispanics (who have replaced English-speaking African-Americans as the largest minority in the U.S.). How this happened has important links to the story of third world and postcolonial scholars in the U.S. academy. The 'open doors' concept of immigration in 1965 meant that older modes of racial hierarchisation were heightened and muted at the same time. The Civil Rights and Black Power movements had put racial justice, "desegregation and equal opportunity" and "a cultural revolution to affirm a distinctive black culture and a positive black identity" (Brush 179, 180) on the agenda and forefront of the fight for civil liberties and equality in the U.S., thus making obvious and transparent the agitation and contention between 'black' and 'white' racialised groups. 1965 marks the moment when older, colonial patterns of settlement and naturalisation came face to face with migration fuelled by new market forces, making multiculturalism the new governing credo of the American nation. This moment brings into being a social restructuring, where, as Sara Wills has argued, "multiculturalism, explicitly as government policy" [in her analysis, in Australia] and "implicitly as 'ethnic' imperative elsewhere, seeks to produce the nation in relation to its 'others', but also in relation to an even more 'intimate enemy' whose loss is internally unspeakable" (51). This intimate enemy, in the case of the U.S., is its black citizenry, against whom the Asian immigrant is henceforth to be defined, compared, contained, regulated, assimilated, and finally celebrated (native and aboriginal peoples do not even figure in this equation, unlike in Canada and Australia, where race relations are defined by contestation with the first peoples of the land). As noted by Frank Chin and reiterated by many Asian American scholars, state injunction is matched by a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby "the function of the Asian American is to be not black" (qtd. Schueller 55). While this critique has its justifications and merits, it is also an oppressive reification of the impossibility of being something outside of the binary of 'black' and 'white' in the U.S.

South Asians occupy a peculiar space in this imaginary: while in terms of skin colour, they are 'not white,' they are nevertheless 'whiter' than their East-Asian compatriots by virtue of their command over a classical, colonial English education, which is the *lingua franca* of the new nation of their adoption[8]. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, due to the originally negligible population of Indian Americans, the U.S. government did not officially classify Indians as being of any particular race. From 1910 to 1920, several courts deemed Indians as white and a few as not white. However, starting from 1923, the official judicial stance classified Indians as 'not white' in accordance with the "common man's understanding" under the assumption that all references to 'white' in U.S. laws are in the common man's use and not scientific (this was prompted by litigation backed by Indians on ownership of property). Such racial attribution ran counter to South Asians' anthropological categorisation in the scientific world, as also their self-understanding, as Aryan/Dravidian or of Caucasoid descent. Coloured hierarchies within the subcontinent notwithstanding, this is also the effect of the denial on the part of South Asians of the *possibility* of being counted as 'racially black' in their own self-conception. This quintessentially subcontinental mindset of affective and political rejection of the category 'black' has characterised Indian migrations to East Africa, Fiji, Guyana and the Caribbean too.

Under the racialised classification of the U.S. Census Bureau in 1930 and 1940, Indian Americans were a separate category, *Hindu*; in 1950 and 1960, they were classified as *Other Race*. But in 1970, in a *volte face* by the U.S. Census Bureau, they began to be classified as *White* as opposed to 'Black' or 'Other' by virtue of their command over English, and propelled by the migration of an educated professional class. This was a huge change from before 1965 when they were denied entry into the U.S. by the INS on the grounds that they were 'inassimilable' and non-white. Since 1980, Indian Americans have been called Indo-Americans or South Asians, a subcategory under the category Asian-American, by dint of their own efforts and agitation in this direction. In each instance, South Asians have engaged in litigation in U.S. courts in order to challenge the racial classification which neither followed the anthropological classification of them as Caucasian nor took into account their professional experience and education (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Americans>). Today, South Asians are amongst the most socio-economically 'successful' immigrants in the U.S., even though the notion of the 'model minority' is a self-fulfilling myth as well as statistical fantasy in myriad, complicated ways. In fact, the notion of model minority is an index of the particular historical ways in which 'race'/racial categorization has, on the one hand, operated as code for old as well as new discriminatory practices in the U.S., and on the other, elided and glossed over huge differences among immigrants. The permutations, combinations and transformations in nomenclatural policies are indicative also of mutating U.S. domestic and foreign policy and suggest that though the INS and the Census Bureau has labeled groups racially, the groups themselves have defined and effected change in the ways in which they might be classified. This restructuring of the racial pecking order had tremendous ramifications for the state of 'race' in post-civil rights U.S. In fact, Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani have suggested that the smooth transition from 'post-civil rights' to the 'postcolonial' in the U.S. academy had detrimental effects on the way in which race was represented institutionally and in the public imaginary from now on[9].

The 1965 INS Act reinforced the black-white antagonism in the U.S. by pitting its historically suppressed, unruly minority against the new 'model' minority. Now, racial stratification worked in tandem with a new *class* hierarchy, dividing the nation into a pre-1965 'general' populace and the post-1965 'highly qualified' entrants into an increasingly competitive capitalist market economy state. For South Asians, who were not ascribed any racial category at all till early twentieth century U.S., this hierarchy worked hand-in-glove with their ancient, inherited ones of caste and class privilege in the Indian subcontinent, which historically ensured for them access to English, the global language of 'progress' and 'prosperity' that now procured for them an easier assimilation in the American melting pot. In the new multicultural nation, they became, in the span of a mere forty-two years, the most educationally and economically 'successful' non-European immigrant group in the U.S. Fuelling this new hierarchy was a well-funded, concerted effort by the foreign diplomacy departments during the Cold War years (1947-1989) to drain away the 'brains' in newly independent Asian and African nations[10] from America's perceived foreign and public enemy number one, the Communist bloc.

Brain-drain from third world countries is the most ideologically marked battle between the Eastern and Western blocs in these years, effecting a rearrangement and repositioning of sites of knowledge. The battle for intellectual capital is apparent at the 1955 Bandung conference in Indonesia, culminating in the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, and the Suez Crisis in 1956-57, leading to the creation of the first United Nations peace-keeping forces. In this battle, the left in the U.S. is an important ally for third-world intellectuals (who arrive at the shores of the U.S. academy with an impressive baggage of the intellectual histories of their own consciousness and subject formation) as it contends with the role of the American nation in its proxy wars between North and South Korea (1950-53), the Lebanon Crisis (1958), the Bay of Pigs Invasion (1961), the Dominican Intervention (1965) and in Vietnam, the prolonged war of containment of communism in South Asia (1957-75). Thus the spectacular ascent of postcolonial scholarship in the U.S. academy is no mere fluke of history but a way of addressing and documenting this third world socio-political ferment and making it intelligible in the first world. Postcolonialism emerges as the dream of a common language with newly-independent nations of the third world establishing their stake in the self-narration of old histories and the creation of new knowledges, as also the delineation of a non-aligned way of being that falls pawn to neither the first nor the second world, while engaging in multipartite dialogue and official multilateralism with both. It is aided by the broader political strategy of interdependence of nations and the need for the U.S. to demonstrate to the world that 'American' ideals of freedom, democracy and capitalism were superior to those offered by communist states such as the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies, China, Cuba and other authoritarian states, even as it waged war in many sites. Senator Ted Kennedy sees 'enlightened' immigration legislation as a persuasive "psychological tool" against communism, and President Lyndon B Johnson uses the idea of a "Great Society" to attract skilled, professional labour to "the land of opportunity" (Asian.Nation).

This is the influential and charged atmosphere in which South Asian academics and intellectuals, under the mantle of postcolonial scholarship, make their presence felt in the U.S. This is the route through which they participate in the American left's celebration of third world self-assertions and struggles; this is also the political route through which they claim solidarity with the Civil Rights Movement, which made the 1965 INS Act possible in the first place. But the old racial divide in the

U.S. between 'whites' and 'blacks' still has a fundamental hold on its national imaginary. Remember that the Little Rock Nine have gone to school only in 1957 amidst great violence and that the historic 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the Brown v/s Board of Education of Topeka making segregated schools unconstitutional leaves unresolved the history and ideology of racial discrimination. There is a lot of work still to be done to address the deep wound of slavery and segregation in the U.S. at this time. Although colonised peoples from Asia and Africa are subject to related and similar discourses of racial categorisation, 'race' functions differently, in significant class-inflected ways, for professionally qualified immigrants seeking participation in the new nation, even if they are from postimperial and postcolonial contexts.

African intellectuals and scholars in this scenario are hailed far more easily than their Asian counterparts into the dream of pan-Africanism, though recent scholarship has begun to tap the equally complex and complicated reciprocal hierarchy between third world 'authentic blacks' from Africa and first world American descendants of 'black Atlantic' traffic[11]. Asian immigrants, on the other hand, are harder to incorporate racially within a professionally ascendant immigrant class, which is why the multiple and contradictory discourses of race spring up to try and categorise what is essentially a class group. The equation changes when the progeny of this professionally qualified class gets incorporated into the national racial schema, and gets naturalised as legitimate American citizens of an 'equal' society. Their conscientisation into political methods of responding to such categorization is also the important transformative moment when theories of hybridity, diaspora and 'third cultures' really proliferate and make sense. However, the class privilege is transferred down the generations along with cultural memory and alternative traditional ways of knowing the world, only *one* of which is 'race' in a legacy of proliferating, and often oppositional identity groups.

Race, Postcolonialism and South Asianness:

I understand 'race' in two ways: a) as an anthropological and ideological tool of social stratification and ethnocentric control exercised by nineteenth-century European rulers, imperialists and colonisers, and b) as a technology of contemporary governance and continuing hegemonic exploitation of marked peoples within white settler multicultural nations like the U.S., Canada and Australia. There are other phenomenological expressions and theoretical explanations of race (many of which predate nineteenth-century Europe), but for the purposes of this chapter, these somewhat simple and post-imperial definitions operate as my guiding principles. I grasp 'race' as a strategy of imposing European civilisational values upon people simultaneously rendered different and inferior, strange and other, in relation to a post-Enlightenment, white, Christian construction of being. This broad generalisation applies to the 'civilising' imperative of the 'white man's burden' that made non-whites out of colonised subjects, as well as to the management tactics of multicultural white settler nation states that seek to control and assimilate their 'constructed-as-other' citizenry, whether they are Irish, Jewish or Islamic, through racialised discourses that change chameleon-like to suit the national agendas.

In the precolonial Indian subcontinent, a long and continuous history of heterogeneous conquests and settlements ensured that diverse racial narratives were well entrenched and ideologically operational even before the arrival of Europeans. Arguably, British colonisation became "an enabling violation" (Spivak) that engendered a creative and dynamic process through which Indian subcontinentals engaged in the dialogue and project of modernity with their European counterparts. In fact, as has been argued by scholars from Bhikhu Parekh to Leela Gandhi to Liz Philipose, the project of modernity is not only *not* the sole prerogative of the West, but becomes possible *solely* through interaction and exchange between the so-called and constructed East and West. This is a radical reading of modernity that Francis Hutchins, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy argue for most persuasively as well. The history of European colonial presence in the Indian subcontinent is thus a multifaceted and fascinating one, one that while not within the purview of this thesis, nevertheless has a direct and particular bearing on the emergence of postcolonial scholarship in Anglo-North America. The intellectual and caste/class elite of the Indian subcontinent made their presence felt right from the first moments of contact with the European world, and actually understood themselves as the inheritors of a far superior civilization. They took the opportunity to enhance their own civilisational value by dialogue with the new one along with reforms at the home base, reforms that were inextricably linked with the struggle for the independence, self-governance and establishment of new nation states in the subcontinent and sparked transformations in the colonial metropolis too. To quote Mary E John, "the imperative to Westernize in postindependence India came coded within the institutions, structures, and terminologies of modernization, progress, and secularism" and enabled the middle class to "take advantage of the mobilities of education" (10). It is no surprise then that "our transition to first-world institutions, especially in the United States, [is] quite possibly among the smoothest within the third world" (John 11)

Here I would like to introduce the useful distinction between 'race' and 'racial categories' as socially instituted ideological tools of governance and domination on the one hand and what Paula Stewart Brush calls 'race consciousness' on the other. In an insightful essay, "Problematizing the Race Consciousness of Women of Colour" (2001), Brush defines race consciousness as "a politicized, oppositional consciousness of race and racism" where "race is understood as a central constituent of identity" and "racism becomes a point of resistance" (173). Making a generational comparison between older and newer black feminists, Brush argues that the realisation of 'being Black' is not an inherently racial event, but was made possible through "the discourse and activism of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements [that] raised black women's race consciousness, enabling them to understand that and how the personal is political" (173). She concludes that the consciousness of being 'raced' *cannot* be assumed to be a given or automatic, but is the result of social movements that bring about this conscientisation. Brush uses Belinda Robnett's formulation of this self-realization as a "conversion process" that entails a three-pronged process of a) developing a sense of "we" consciousness, b) adopting an oppositional interpretive frame, and c) mobilising oppositional accounts and practices (Brush 180, 178, 179). The 'conversion' of black people who "differently confronted, interpreted, and accepted the political discourse" had to take different forms "depending on their positions, especially on their *education, class, gender, and geographic location*" (Brush 180 emphasis mine)[12]. Persuaded by Brush's analysis, I offer that the 'race consciousness' of South Asian postcolonial feminists as women of colour is a particularly problematic development in the Anglo-North American academy, given the socio-political and historical contexts of 'skilled' post-1965 immigration. Their own histories of caste, class, and educational privilege affords for them "non-economic forms of capital, such as social and cultural capital" that Cynthia Feliciano traces back to their "pre-immigration class position" in their nations of origin (316, 317).

Wini Breines, in a wonderfully rich, recent, comparative historical account of the Bread and Roses and the Combahee River collectives cites confessions of early black feminists like Audre Lorde on "how forbidden it was for black women to write" (1114). This assertion is repeated by early women of colour, many of them first-generation university goers, who used poetry to convey their politics, as a way of opposing the 'theoretical-language' hegemony of the academy. Their entrance into the space of the university is not only a racial accomplishment and gendered transgression but one that, equally importantly, crosses the class barrier[13]. This is not a journey that would resonate in the same way with third-world scholars like Mohanty, who would have been second, if not third generation university attendees, and whose passage to the U.S. is "overdetermined by class aspirations" (John 11, 7) whether they arrived with competitive international scholarships, or accompanied professional husbands. After all, one cannot discount the symbolic weight of the historical event that "two women graduated from Calcutta University in 1883, *before* women in Britain were granted academic credentials" (John 9, emphasis in the original). The historical descendants of these women take on "political functions in their new locations" via what John calls the "unintended effects" of "discrepant dislocations" (16). Whatever oppositional or revolutionary potential these women might have had before immigrating (and it is arguable if there was any), the move from "a sheltered Indian middle class environment, where a consciousness of privilege predominates, to a milieu as highly sexualized and with such intensified and refined 'technologies of gender' as the North American one does lead to the espousal of a more explicitly feminist politics" (John 16). In fact I suggest in the next chapter that this social awareness and politicisation is the effect of the *dislocation of class and the delocalisation of place* in the diaspora, and how the signifiers and markers of the same get read, interpreted and harnessed in the multicultural, capitalist regime of the white-settler nation.

Thus we have the volatile structural contestation in the U.S. academy between English-educated, upper-caste, middle-class, mobile, predominantly heterosexual South Asian scholars and *equally* positioned white feminists about *who* can 'speak' and how to exercise control over knowledge production and representation, a contestation that comes to a head with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985). Meanwhile, the sphere of 'black feminisms' is taken up by local African-American stake-holders rather than immigrant intellectuals from Africa, who are predominantly male, or by local Black Panthers activism, whose particular patriarchal concerns are only now being excavated. In fact, there is a peculiarly gendered inflection to women in the Humanities and Social Sciences from the Indian subcontinent who demand a space in the U.S. academy, a gendering that is influenced by the 'social demand' to have available an accomplished and attractive English-educated 'bride' pool in the highly competitive caste-and-religion determined marriage market (witness the continuing phenomenon of the matrimonial column in subcontinental and its diasporic media). For them, neither 'race' nor 'class' is a central defining principle (they don't have to think about it); instead, a standing and speaking place in 'academic' feminism becomes their "narrative about the discovery of [self and] representation itself" (John 19). In contrast, as Breines notes, most of the founding members of black feminist groups like Combahee River Collective were "lesbians or in the process of coming out" (1112). She quotes Barbara Smith that "it was not an accident that most of them were lesbians or bisexuals since they had less to lose in staking out a radical feminist antihomophobic or prolesbian politics" (Breines 1113).

In this epistemological territory staking, it is useful to remember, as Breines shows, that the black feminist struggle in the Civil War era was a struggle for racial justice rather than for the ideal of integration so dear to their white feminist peers (1099). Breines marks the significance of the "time gap between the development of the radical white women's liberation movement in the 1960s and the political articulation of a black feminism more than five years later" which she explains as follows: "At the moment that white early secondwavers were developing an autonomous socialist feminism, black nationalism was at its height"

(1113). Black nationalism is fought explicitly on the grounds of 'being black' which is different from anti-imperialist nationalisms of the third world. But, in "neither the women's liberation movement nor the nationalist movement could black women assume subject status; their sense of exclusion from the two liberationist discourses of the period is eloquently expressed in the title *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave*" (1121). Breines shows how the first black feminists' involvement in lesbian politics had its political fallout in the "heterosexist and homophobic" chauvinism of their Black 'brothers' who became embroiled in "romantic liaisons with white women" (1120). This struggle over white men is not so pronounced in third world scholars from South Asia and the competition for white men is not staked between black and South Asian women anyway.

Breines goes on to elaborate that black feminist struggle was also against a kind of "third worldism" that "characterized the politics of many sixties white radicals" who "supported a position that verged on the sycophantic and/or adulation of third world revolutionaries" (1108). She quotes Kobena Mercer who diagnoses this eager embrace of third worldism as a guilty denial by white leftists as a "dis-affiliation from [their] dominant self-images, a kind of strategic self-othering" (ibid). And just as the uncritical recognition of the heroism of third world freedom fighters by the U.S. left is linked to a motivated "denial of the legitimacy of their white and middle-class backgrounds" (ibid), third world postcolonial intellectuals' ready inheritance and sanctioned claim to a romantic, nostalgic 'third worldism' leaves unexamined their own caste-and-class positionalities[14]. Such a strategic occupation of 'third world' space can be applied to postcolonial South Asian scholars in the U.S. academy too, notwithstanding their own legitimate cultural memory and historical struggles. One of the important appeals Spivak makes is precisely the project of "unlearning our privilege as our loss" and not succumbing to the 'instant soup syndrome' whereby you "just add the euphoria of hot water and you have soup, and you don't have to question yourself as to how the power was produced" (*PC* 9). My doubt about the validity of 'women of colour' feminisms for South Asian scholars is prompted by such a desire to, if not unlearn, then at least be aware of and understand the processes of production of my own privilege.

Postcolonial scholars, with their superb education in the traditions of European epistemologies and their involvement in the socio-political ferment across the third world arrive more as insiders than outsiders in the project of knowledge making in the U.S. academy. Just as an example, the Holy Trinity of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak hails from third world nations (Egypt and India respectively) that were fully imbricated in the project of modernity via early encounters and exchanges in Enlightenment. The three postcolonial scholars come from the upper echelons of society in Cairo, Bombay and Calcutta respectively, metropolitan colonial centers that were the hub of cultural ferment and cosmopolitanism. The case of 'Arab' or 'Middle Eastern' scholarship in the U.S is a fascinating and complicated case-study, outside the purview of this dissertation, though not unrelated, but in the case of South Asian scholars, I am not making just a simple or simplistic case for them being one of the fabled model minorities: I acknowledge the intricacy of 'race' as a double-edged sword in the 'common sense' social sense that has been used against and by them systematically in the annals of U.S. history. However, given the privileged subcontinental immigration post-1965, the scholars who come to take their place in the U.S academy in the 1970s and 1980s, are a very different kettle of fish than their 'black' peers. Their struggles are for different epistemological rights, though fought in the academic world too.

The right to voice, representation and standing in the university is a matter of class and professional equity, one that upper-caste, middle-class, English-educated South Asian intellectuals have *already* won for themselves *before* they even arrive on the shores of American academe. They *enter* the U.S. as scholars. Whether this translates to equal access in terms of hiring, funding and publishing practices is an important, valid question, but the symbolic weight of their academic history cannot be negated either. Their stake in the U.S. university system, dictated not so much by the right to 'speak' as to be 'hired,' is at cross-purposes with the equally necessary and legitimate struggle for U.S. black feminists and women of colour to just enter and be accepted in the hallowed halls of knowledge. But some South Asian postcolonial feminists soon declare shared concerns with U.S. feminists of colour, *on the grounds of colour*, most particularly regarding the production of knowledge and subject in Anglo-American feminist theory, even though they do not have the same or even parallel relationship to racialisation or race consciousness in the American nation. The agenda and tag of feminisms of colour (and their contemporary partners in critical race theory) is taken up by some South Asian postcolonial feminists in their interrogation of the workings of the multicultural academy in the U.S. Some affiliate themselves and self-identify with the label 'women of colour'; others vehemently oppose and object to such an imposition of specifically *American* racial templates of categorisation. This alignment of third world postcolonial scholarship with feminisms of colour, while conducive to conversations and coalitions in the story of feminism, leads to the competitive conflict game of access to institutional power. Instead of offering a broad based platform of equity and equality *across* social groups, the institutionalisation and disciplining of feminism in the academy on the whole has led to the containment of oppositional, border-crossing, social-justice work on the one hand, and to the in-fighting over professional and decidedly middle-class privileges and positions in the university on the other.

Thus (skipping a few stages in this struggle) the charge holds water that when affirmative action policies are put into place, 'foreign born' postcolonial and transnational feminists are valued over 'indigenous' and 'pre-national' Black and Latina/Chicana scholars of colour and flung in a merry-go-round of adversarial quota fulfillment. All of this happens of course against the backdrop of white privilege and the power of whiteness that affirmative action policies seek to redress. Let me elaborate on where I am coming from. In a particularly charged example of American exceptionalism, Malini Johar Schueller suggests in her 2003 essay, "Articulations of African-Americanism in South Asian Postcolonial Theory: Globalism, Localism, and the Question of Race," that "every identity, institution, and social practice in the United States" is "saturated with race" and therefore, "the homogenized ideas of global diaspora and transnationalism, all of which are being increasingly deployed... as emancipatory paradigms (often beyond race), in fact meet their limits when we introduce the question of race" (53, 36). Schueller contends that race is a blindspot in the work of postcolonial scholars like Homi K Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai and Gayatri Spivak, even as they, she states, "construct themselves in some way in response to blackness" (55). Sandra K Soto echoes this concern more specifically in her 2005 question: "Where in the Transnational World Are U.S. Women of Color?" Soto critiques Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal's 'transnational' position in *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World*, and questions the conflation of the terms 'third world woman' and 'woman of colour.' She expresses doubts that these "critical genealogies" are indeed germane to contemporary "transnational feminist cultural practices of research and teaching" (Kennedy & Beins 113, 115). Schueller and Soto are responding to the divide-and-conquer politics of an institutionalised and racialised feminism that Barbara Christian warned us against decades ago in "The Race for Theory."

There is much merit in these cautions against the homogenising impulses of current diasporic, postcolonial and transnational theories. However, a 'logical' conclusion of this injunction, that postcolonial theory *should* make the analysis of race *de rigueur* in its analyses of power in America is problematic (and a bit myopic) because it makes a 'common sense' and arbitrary (even if consolidated and entrenched) *whiteness* the ultimate standard bearer and arbiter of justice for the whole world! I propose that while the analysis of race, in its imperial and post-imperial manifestations, remains foundationally integral to the work of South Asian postcolonial and transnational feminists, it works on a different register that is not confined to the discussion of race only within the borders of the American nation, but takes into consideration the ways in which 'race' has been a factor in the international distribution of power. Even as the issue of Asians' relationship to blackness remains a pertinent one in American life, I am not sure that the American discussion of 'race' understood in reference to whiteness, addresses these issues in the global arena of scholarship. There, the politics of the first v/s third worlds and global North v/s South relations come into play in hiring, funding, administrative and publishing hierarchies. Thus the U.S.-specific struggle does not translate into a global template for racial justice, either in the world arena or even within the American nation, given the different ways in which racial formation is understood and deployed in diverse geographical locales and historically specific sites. I do take seriously, however, the charge that U.S. women of color come to 'disappear' in the trajectories of transnationality in the American academy.

Current theories of transnationalism announce a celebratory and emancipatory narrative that protests (too much) to transcend borders and national peripheries, no matter that in a post 9/11 world, border control and security have become entrenched terms of discourse attesting to the resurgence of an unexamined patriotism and that fundamentalist nationalisms are on the rise the world over. In the field of feminism, which, as I have argued[15], behaves like a nation, this has posed a few problems for postcolonial feminisms, which traditionally straddled the newly independent nations of the third world *and* the new world in America. When postcolonial theorists take on the racial politics of colour in the U.S., they make opaque their own caste-and-class based privileged positionalities vis-à-vis their places of origin while privileging the racial domination schema of America. Chandra Talpade Mohanty is one such scholar who makes the claim to 'women of colour' subjectivity particularly problematic in the context of third world women. By taking up a discussion of South-Asian feminist postcolonial theorisations around race and racialisation at its moment of historical emergence in the late 1970s, I hope to offer a reconsideration of the very term 'woman of colour' itself *in relation to* subcontinental Indian scholars (and perhaps others) from the third world.

This chapter thus intends an *internal* self-critique of the way the term 'feminisms of colour' has been deployed by, and characterises, the political description and agenda of, some South Asian postcolonial and diasporic intellectuals, who are racialised and marked as other in white settler colonies. I am careful to say *internal*, because in an academy that continues to be marked by the black/white binary, I do not want to argue that 'race' does not matter; indeed I cannot: the overwhelming evidence of power differentials would mitigate against me. In this court, it is crucial to remember that the jury is still out as far as issues of representation and voice are concerned. Therefore my argument is *not* to be taken as a call or mandate against feminisms of colour or critical race theory. My plea is for a closer and more nuanced reading of the way the term 'women of colour' circulates for South Asian feminists at a specific moment in U.S. history, specifically the 1970s when postcolonial theory is on the ascendant in the Anglo-American academy. I contend that the broader *political* goal of postcolonial theory (an agenda Schueller objects to vehemently) as a methodology to unpack the acute historical specificities of different power relations in the global North and South today is undermined by un-self-reflexive and unreconstructed uses of the identity category of color in the U.S. I argue that such uses of the term reinforce the black/white binary of power relations in Anglo-North America, instead of disarming it, as was intended by the intellectuals who originally used the term *within* the nation. When second wave feminisms struggled with the questions of place, belonging and affiliation as political forms of protest, they were not valourising *just* identity; rather they were examining the different ways in which one's identity impacted upon one's politics. Postcolonial feminism, with its initial emphasis on the third world vis-à-vis the first, and recent analyses of the global North and South, is a more accurate umbrella term under which to mobilise and argue for the constituencies of South Asian scholars who date their entry into the U.S. academic life post 1965s.

The next section looks at Anzaldúa and Mohanty as narrators who tell the stories of differently 'marked' and 'located' female bodies at the end of the 1970s; stories that cannot be divorced from the socio-political upheavals in the U.S. following the slow and sure squashing and silencing of the Civil Rights Movement and the significant increase in immigration in the U.S. On the one hand, an ethics of political solidarity is expressed in the coming together of 'women of colour' and 'third world women' and on the other, there are significant, indeed incommensurable, differences in the 'origins' and 'affiliations to place' of these groups of women. Women of colour are the nationed and legitimate, therefore unruly and troubled/troublesome outsiders *within* the American imaginary, while third world women are the pliant but ungovernable aliens, foreigners to the dominant 'belonging' of the nation, who have to be domesticated using administrative, judicial and social codes of civilisational superiority.

Thus the valence of terms like woman of colour, third world woman, postcolonial and transnational feminism, has to be understood *not only* discursively within the context of a multicultural, and therefore racialised, Western/Northern context, but *more specifically* as separate histories of oppositional theory that explain the transformations in the notion of feminist 'identity' in the twentieth century. The development of these terms has to be historically linked to the extraordinary movements of professional bodies from the third world to the first, the exigencies of diasporic displacement and the resurgence of a racially fundamentalist modern nation-state in this century.

PART TWO: To Return to the Topic

The Circulation of Terms and Genealogies of Colour:

> We are the colored in a white feminist movement.
> We are the feminists among the people of our culture.
> We are often the lesbians among the straight.
> We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words.
>
> Moraga & Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back* 23.

The term "women of colour" blazed into prominence in 1981 via Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's co-edited anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour* (referred to as *Bridge* hereafter). However frequently the term 'women of color' might have circulated in the open domain earlier, things were not the same after the anthology by, on, and for "radical women of color" was published by the now defunct Persephone Press. Teresa de Lauretis testifies that "the shift in feminist consciousness that has been taking place during this decade may be said to have begun (if a convenient date is needed) with 1981, the year of publication of *This Bridge Called My Back*" (qtd. Aanerud 71). Anzaldúa continues her work with women of colour theory-making in two subsequent anthologies: *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, published in 1990 as a stock-taking exercise (referred to as *Making* hereafter), and *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, a reflective, commemorative collection co-edited with AnaLouise Keating in 2002 (referred to as *home* hereafter).

While all three anthologies are the collective result of different women's voices, Anzaldúa remains the common integer in all three; thus my focus on her as an especially representative and committed voice of feminism/women of colour so far. If *Bridge* in 1981 was an attempt to confront the "Racism in the white women's movement" in alliance with black feminism and third world struggles, in a "thorough, personal, direct, empirical and theoretical way," *Making* in 1990 is all "*gestos subversivos*" that speak out against coloured bodies being "'written all over... carved and tattooed with the sharp needles of experience" (xv). In 1990, Anzaldúa admits that her "urge to anthologize" is a desire to represent more voices in "women's studies courses" instead of "tokenizing the same half dozen *mujeres*" experiencing burnout in their "literary/political movement" (xvii, xvi). At the height of radical, oppositional movements of colour in the U.S. in the 1990s, she declares the need for a recharged "metaphor for constructing one's identity," to overcome "self-hatred and other internalized oppressions" by "*haciendo caras*, making faces" (*Making* xvi, xv). There is a kind of frenzy to give voice to women, who, "in university surroundings, are often thrown into confusion about their ethnic and/or racial identity" (xvii). But *Making* is also a "testimonial of survival" for "ethnic mestizas who have been silenced before uttering a word, or, having spoken, not been heard" in "the politics of address" of "feminist readership" (*Making* xviii, xvii). *home* in 2002 is an invitation to "intergenerational dialogue" that seeks to "show the ruptures y los desconocimientos (ignored knowledge) around identity issues, revealing how much has shifted in the last twenty years, but also how little has changed" (*home* 3).

Anzaldúa's "making anthologies" is therefore a kind of dynamic "activism" (*home* 9) that witnesses, records and documents the journey of radical women of colour and their conscientisation into mainstream U.S. feminist discourse:

> Twenty-one years ago, we struggled with the recognition of difference within the context of commonality. Today we grapple with the recognition of commonality within the context of difference. (*home* 2)

Reflecting the changing socio-political and academic-intellectual climate of the U.S., contributions to all three anthologies transform method and message. They are an index of how today, "categories of race and gender are more permeable and flexible than they were for those of us growing up prior to the 1980s" (*home* 2). But the 'us' in *Bridge* and *Making* remains more or less consistent, even though there are other contributors who ally themselves with the cause of "Chicanas/*mexicanas*" and "*mujer*, *macho*, working class" women (*Making* xv.). This is a significant point of contrast to keep in mind given the immigration history I have detailed in Part One: the constituency that defines Anzaldúa's anthologies is mostly Hispanic, just as the constituency that marks postcolonial feminism is arguably, predominantly of South Asian origin (these are terms used by U.S. census bureau and immigration, rather than by the women themselves). Their presences in the U.S. university system are mediated by their different journeys/struggles of arrival into the *classed* project of knowledge production. It is only in *home* that Anzaldúa departs from her earlier agenda and "questions the terms white and women of colour by showing that whiteness may not be applied to all whites, as some possess women-of-color consciousness, just as some women of color bear white consciousness" (2). She clarifies that:

> To include whites is not an attempt to restore the privilege of white writers, scholars, and activists; it is a refusal to walk the colour line. To include men (in this case, feminist-oriented ones) is to collapse the gender line. These inclusions challenge conventional identities and promote more expansive configurations of identities — some of which will soon become cages and have to be dismantled. (*home* 4)

Anzaldúa's co-editor, Keating, though "skeptical" of any significant response from the mainstream feminism to "calls for visibility" from women of colour, also recognises that labels can be "potentially imprisoning" and become "frozen and turn into walls dividing 'us' from each other" (*home* 9, 11).

This is a full turning of the circle since *Bridge*'s inception, and supports Anzaldúa's new belief that no home offers safety, familiarity or intimacy. Instead of *Bridge* being a "safe home," she offers bridging as "the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without" (*home* 3). The twenty years that she spent in the struggle for equity and dignity were marked, in her last years, by self-reflection, spiritual and psychic introspection and the acknowledgement to "risk leaving home" (*home* 5). Home as the quintessential trope of feminist belonging indeed undergoes transformation even as she passes the baton on to the next generation before her untimely passing in 2004. Mohanty, another interrogator of the feminist home, paying tribute to women of colour in the U.S., talks of how that home was not "comfortable, stale, inherited, and familiar" but "an imaginative, politically charged space in which the familiarity and sense of affection and commitment lay in shared collective analysis of social injustice, as well as a vision of radical transformation" ("Crafting" 491). That Anzaldúa had to rescue this sense of home from a racialised, ethnicised sense of being in 2002 is a marker of her own alert finger on the pulse of contemporary times, and an all important piece in my own sense of what U.S. feminisms of colour has meant for me. I return to those formative post-1965 moments when *Bridge* did offer home to certain constituencies.

The radical writers of *Bridge* took up the term 'woman of colour' as a battle cry, as a "coming to terms to community – race, group, class, gender, self" (vii), as a rite of passage, in fact, a complicated "passage through" (xiv) the experience of being separately *and* equally, gendered and racialised entities in the U.S. Toni Cade Bambara makes clear in her "Foreword" to the first edition of *Bridge* that this anthology was an exercise in bringing together communities that had been subject to the "conflict game of divide and conquer" of neo/colonial rule and in coaxing them into "the habit of listening to each other and learning each other's ways of seeing and being" (vi, vii). By this token, women of colour in the U.S. claimed solidarity with "all Third World peoples and peoples of color unless otherwise specified" (*Bridge* xiv). Even as Bambara recognizes the significant divergences between the positionality and politics of women hailing from different parts of the world, she also agrees, with the editors, that vis-à-vis the American nation, both groups face similar and systemic patterns of discrimination through otherisation and racism.

Bridge, an open challenge to white women's racism in hegemonic feminism, was also a "positive affirmation of the commitment of women of color" to their "*own* feminism" as well as "a revolutionary tool falling into the hands of peoples of all color" (xxiii, xxvi). *Bridge* thus became *the* classic text for the production of the subject-position that answers to the label 'woman of color' now. Its myriad readers testify to how the writings facilitated their "consciousness" of and "politicization" into being racially marked bodies in Anglo-North America (*Bridge* xiii), thereby enabling an attendant interrogation of the terms of discourse of feminist theory and practice, of academic and activist feminism. Readers of *Bridge* who self-identify as 'women of colour' testify to its foundational impact in helping them acknowledge and *name* their journey as "a coming home" (*home* 45). For Hispanic scholars like Hector Carbajal, it was "the locale of self-identification, self-discovery, and the inspiration for a new consciousness" (*home* 51). For postcolonial scholars like Mohanty, it was "the first time" she was able to think through her "own gendered, classed, postcolonial history" ("Crafting" 491).

However, Rebecca Aenerud's work on *Bridge*'s citation history also brings out the contradictory complexity of its reception:

> *Bridge* is one of *the most* cited books in feminist theorizing[16]. However authors do not discuss *Bridge*'s content and specific arguments. Rather, *Bridge* serves as a marker of change, often cited with other feminist-of-color titles.... For white feminists, *Bridge* and these other titles makes "difference" an issue no longer possible to avoid. And yet, paradoxically, its inclusion – without textual engagement – in citation lists reproduces the very same marginality that *Bridge* so succinctly critiques. (71)

Aenerud's words in 2002 echo Moraga's in 1981 when she explains in the "Preface" to *Bridge* how it emerged from frustrations experienced by 'women of colour' of sexism in the Left movement and racism in the "lesbian separatist utopia" (xiii). *Bridge* marked the "shock of difference" and the "joy of commonness" of Chicana and Black women, straight and gay, experiencing the "pain" and "calculated damage" of marginalizing and exclusionary practices of the two social movements of the time (xiv). However, Moraga is emphatic that this coming together of minds was not, indeed could not be "unilaterally defined by color and class" (*Bridge* xiv). That would be a homogenising imposition on the loaded and specific histories of the two constituencies. She alludes to her peers, Audre Lorde, Rosario Morales and Gloria Anzaldúa, who insist on the *historicity* of the oppression that unites U.S. women of color. Today, what seems to have remained unchanged is the dissatisfaction of self-identified women of colour with white women in failing to contend with and recognize this history, an indictment Keating repeats twenty-years after *Bridge* in *home*, citing Chicana feminist, Norma Alarcón, that "the reverential respect toward *This Bridge* on the part of Anglo-American feminists [is] still mainly 'cosmetic,' just a nod toward diversity" (*home* 7). Then, as now, the burden of the "conversion experience" towards a "transformative, coalitional consciousness" is borne by 'women of color' (*home* 8, 6) who are called upon to throw their bodies "over a river of tormented history to bridge the gap" (*Bridge* xv). Again, this conversion cannot be a given, but depends on a historical consciousness-raising via a radical politics.

Here I wish to make an intervention in terms of naming what Alarçon has called the "theoretical subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back*" in relation to Anglo-American feminism. She contends that the "most popular subject of Anglo-American feminism is an autonomous, self-making, self-determining subject who first proceeds according to the logic of identification with regard to the subject of consciousness, a notion usually viewed in the purview of man, but now claimed for women" (*Making* 357). I would argue that the term 'woman of colour' partakes of a similar progression from 'identification' to 'consciousness,' a common experience the readers of *Bridge* testify to repeatedly. Even as Alarçon critiques "the inherited view of consciousness" of white Anglo-American feminist subjects that reveals "their ethnocentric liberal underpinnings," her expansive analysis of *Bridge* reveals that women of colour too are "a tacit political identity" based on *recognition* and "consciousness as the site of knowledge" (*Making* 362, 366). As Anzaldúa says, *haciendo caras* or "making faces" is a "metaphor for constructing one's identity" and the readers of the anthology must "do the work of piecing the text together" in order to resume the "fragmented and interrupted dialogue" between and among women of colour (*Making* xvi, xvii). The making of 'coloured' subjectivity thus necessitates a bildungsroman, i.e. a *journey towards the* *formation of a consciousness*, the *making* of a self that is signaled with the provocative question, "How do I come to be a racialised or a gendered body?" This is what Brush identifies as the process of coming towards a "race consciousness" (171) in a journey marked by different experiences that have to be sifted and sorted with a focus on one aspect of it in order to arrive at the singular epiphany of race/colour consciousness.

Curiously, throughout *Bridge*, the word 'colored' is "used by the editors in referring to all Third World peoples and people of color unless otherwise specified" (xiv). In 1981, this is an important, if ambitious and overly idealistic move, as it assumes a common goal of working against oppression for peoples all over the world. As Chela Sandoval concludes, the powerful oppositional consciousness and differential methodology of the U.S. third world feminist model has indeed devolved to a demographic category, that of women of colour. Even as I take her point within the context of U.S. academy, I feel that the bemoaning of the failure of the movement to become bigger than it did is a persistent example of U.S. exceptionalism that insists on viewing larger conceptual issues through its own socio-political lens. Bambara warns against such an assumption of universality in her "Foreword" by saying that "of course it takes more than the self-disclosure and the bold glimpse of each others' life documents to make the grand resolve to fearlessly work toward potent meshings" (*Bridge* vii). Wisely, she predicts that it is not the Foreword, but "the Afterword that'll count" (*Bridge* viii). That afterword has come home to roost in contemporary U.S. feminist politics. The term 'women of colour,' birthed in American soil that enabled what Mohanty calls the "*common context of struggle*" (*TWW* 7, emphasis in the original), has now become as oppressive and constricting a container as the ones its creators wanted to avoid.

The landscape of feminism in the U.S. has undergone a sea change from 1981 to 2001. While it might be argued that the more things change, the more they remain the same, it is impossible not to take in the real shift in feminist theorizing from the street to the university in this twenty-year period. Contributors to *Bridge* ranged from first-generation writers and poets to seasoned activist and academics, most of whom wrote to appeal to the lay feminist reader, activist and organiser. Ten years later, contributors to *Making* display a theoretical savvy that is matched by their creative input. The editors of *Bridge* in 1981 had envisioned it as "a required text in most women's studies courses" (*Bridge* xxvi), thereby securing its place in the university. Twenty years later, Keating, co-editor of *home*, is amazed, and somewhat dismayed, at the predominantly theoretical turn in writings by women of colour. In my opinion, this is a quite natural outcome given the text's frequent use in the academy in the 1980's (though it was out of print by 2000), and therefore not surprising that 'radical women of color' of *Bridge* produced the next generation of 'feminists' who do 'hard theory' in a marked departure from the *poetics* of their predecessors, mentors and intellectual foremothers.

Audre Lorde may have announced at "The Personal and the Political" Panel at the Second Sex Conference in 1979 that "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (reproduced in *Bridge* 98-101), but by 1990, 'feminism' has firmly moved into the U.S. academy and made use of specialised, theoretical language in order to maintain its foothold as a legitimate field of study in cutthroat university atmosphere.

Thus *Making*, published in 1990, at the height of feminist ferment in the academy, announces on its cover that this anthology includes "creative and critical perspectives" by "feminists" (as distinct from 'women') of color. That the political label 'women' has morphed into 'feminists' is a testament to the *arrival* of the latter in the academy and understandably, women of colour's move into the institution has been influenced by the kind of language used in it. We must also remember the general decline in poetry as a political tool post the radical 1970's, a genre employed most frequently by women of colour, both those schooled in the world and in the academy. Poetry is no longer deemed to have that kind of power of theoretical articulation in the U.S., however transformative or radical its charge might be in other parts of the world. Adrienne Rich, for example, reminds us in 2006, that poetry that engages in a "continuous redefining of freedom" has itself become a "stunted language" to parallel how freedom itself has become a "word now held under house arrest by the rhetoric of the 'free' market" and that in such dark times, "we need poetry more than ever" ("Legislators of the World"). So the scant use of poetry by the contributors to *Making* and *home* is evidence of market forces that govern contemporary publishing regimes.

The institutionalisation of feminist theorising is cause for both celebration and disillusionment for radical women of colour, as such a triumphant arrival and acceptance in the academy also necessitates a dabbling in and getting one's hands dirty with its epistemological tools. However, the theoretical corralling of the women's movement in the university and the attendant pressure cooker forces of the publishing industry again has its effect on the radical politics of women of colour. As

Christian cautions us in "The Race for Theory," the sad realisation that feminist theorising has become just "a commodity which helps determine whether we are hired or promoted in academic institutions" should lead us to "distinguish the desire for [institutional] power from the need to become empowered" (*Making* 342, 343). By 2002, Anzaldúa is convinced that the oppositional politics and poetics of feminisms of colour has ended in erecting walls and that we need to "break the impasse between women of color and other groups" like "transgendered people, and Arab and South Asian/Indian Americans": this change in direction is evident in her choice of title for *home*, where 'feminism' completely drops out of the title to be replaced by "radical visions for transformation" on the cover. This is a vision shared by her third world peers and postcolonial interlocutors.

Territorial Terminologies and Affective Affiliations:

> Such a book is in high demand these days. A book by radical women of color.
>
> Cherríe Moraga, "Preface"
> *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* 1981.

> In 1983 a leading feminist publisher told us (with kindly condescension) that there was no such field as "third world feminisms." In 1990 feminists of color are transforming the contours of the academy and the polity.
>
> (editors) Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo & Lourdes Torres. "Preface"
> *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* 1991.

In 1982, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Ann Russo initiated a conference at the University of Illinois called "Common Differences: Third World Women and Feminist Perspectives." Ten years later, in the "Preface" to the essay collection emerging from this conference, *Third World Women* *and the Politics of Feminism* (referred to as *TWW* hereafter), the editors, Mohanty, Russo and Lourdes Torres, refer to that international gathering of women at Urbana-Champaign as "one of the very first occasions for women of color and white women in the United States and women from third world countries to come together around their/our 'common differences'" (ix). These common differences are ranged across nations, worlds, and colour, – the United States in relation to other countries, the first and the third worlds, white women/women of colour and women from the third world. The conference had more than 150 speakers, an audience of 2000 people, and "called into question the very terms of the definition of *feminism*"[17] (*TWW* ix). It set up a productive method of "analysis... made possible by the precise challenges posed by 'race' and postcolonial studies to the second wave of white feminisms" (*TWW* 3).

The editors of *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* examine the term 'third world women' in great detail, a term they prefer over 'postcolonial' because it "foregrounds a history of colonization and contemporary relationships of structural domination between first and third world peoples (*TWW* x). Mohanty, in her "Introduction," titled "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism" (referred to as "Cartographies" hereafter), also uses the term "interchangeably" with the "inherently political" term, 'women of color' (*TWW* 7). Here she cites Moraga and Anzaldúa who remark on how "Third World women derive a feminist political theory specifically from our [women of color's] racial/cultural background and experience" (*Bridge* xxiv). This is a debt she acknowledges in "Crafting" when she discloses the ambitious plan in 1984 to start a "Women of Color Institute for Radical Research and Action" in consultation with "Barbara Smith, Papusa Molina, Jacqui Alexander, Gloria Joseph, Mitsuye Yamada, Kesho Scott, among others" (491). The plan did not materialize, but Mohanty continued to feel supported by "a sense of home and community in relation to women of color in the U.S." ("Crafting" 491).

TWW does for feminists from the then so-called 'third world' what Gloria Joseph and Jill Lewis's *Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White Feminist Perspectives* (1981, from which Mohanty and Russo took their conference title), Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith's *All the Women are White, All The Blacks Are Men, But Some Of Us Are Brave* (1982), Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1983), Barbara Smith's *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (1983), and Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* (1984) had done for 'women of colour' in the United States of America. It catapulted into recognition and prominence the category of 'third world woman' as a legitimate *but* differentiated *field of study* in the mainstream Anglo-North American feminist movement. Mohanty asks in her "Introduction" an introductory set of questions that frames the entire anthology, questions that bear repetition in the new global configurations of power:

> Who/What is the third world? Do third world women make up any kind of constituency? On what basis? Can we assume that third world women's political struggles are necessarily "feminist"? How do we/they define feminism?... Which/whose history do we draw on to chart this map of third world women's' engagement with feminism? How do questions of gender, race, and nation intersect in the determining feminisms in the third world? (2-3)

These questions emerge because under colonialism, the category of 'third world women' served imperial, otherising and orientalising ideologies. But *not once* do the contributors to *TWW* scrutinise the term 'women of color': it seems to appear 'naturally' and unself-consciously in the lexicon of Anglo-North-American feminist scholarship. However novel the term 'women of colour' might have been during the "Common Differences" conference, by the time the papers are edited and published in 1991 by Russo, Torres and Mohanty, it has been around for ten (and more) years, acquired validity, veracity and meaning through the words of other feminist pioneers and theorists of colour and commands respect as a subject of scholarship and appellate of affiliation.

TWW contains an essay Chandra Talpade Mohanty is most famous and cited for, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse" (referred to as "Under" hereafter), which offers explanations of the discursive category called 'third world women'. Mohanty interrogates 'third world women' as produced by colonial and anthropological feminist scholars representing Western modes of epistemological enquiry. She is careful not to cede the grounds of feminism to a constructed, monolithic West, but seeks to lay bare the "textual strategies" of particular Western feminist discourses that "codify Others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western" ("Under"52). Then Mohanty offers her own take on the nomenclatural category 'third world' woman, as understood by herself, a scholar speaking from the position of an insider, but by no means representative of the putative third worlder. She sees as arbitrary the connection between "Woman" ("a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through diverse representational discourses") and "women" ("real, material subjects of their collective histories"); therefore the relation between them is not "of direct identity" but rather produced by "hegemonic discourses" in "particular cultures" (Under" 53). Thus Mohanty argues for the urgent need to create "an analytical space for understanding Third World women as *subjects* of our various struggles *in history*" and for our differences to be "historically specified and understood as part of larger political processes and systems ("Race" 180). This need is linked to the large presence of such women in the U.S. academy of the time and the problems this posed for liberal education in the 1970s.

In this project of knowledge making, Mohanty's essay offers two different and oppositional definitions of the term 'third world woman': first, the normative, homogenous group of uniformly oppressed and backward 'Women' from the 'Third World' created as fit object of study and uplift by 'Western' scholars who see themselves united under the *free* and adjectivally-unencumbered label of 'feminist' and, by implication, as enlightened, women[18], and second, an affirmative, self-identificatory, political and constructive label used for building coalition among women who have experienced common contexts of colonisation, marginalisation and racialisation in the postimperial[19] and neocolonial world. This two-pronged move is symptomatic of the tug of war of *representation* (which is then tied to issues of voice and power) between first world and third world women. The first half of the move questions the uncritical mode of Western humanism and its so-called "disinterested scholarship" which constructs women from non-European countries as "fragmented, inarticulate voices in (and from) the dark" ("Race" 180). This move, also theorised by Jenny Sharpe, Mary Louise Pratt and Kumari Jayawardena, positions Third World women as the black mirror in which liberal white, Western feminists may see themselves reflected in their resplendent glory. The second half works as the alibi for a dominant national ideology of the U.S. as the crucible of democracy and arbiter of justice and equality the world over. This ideology, solidified in U.S. foreign policy, provides it with a continued *raison d'etre* in its modern day imperial conquests (justified again through its liberal feminist arm) and back home, enacts itself in the myopic management politics of diversity and the corporate celebration of difference.

Upon its first publication in *Boundary 2* in 1984 (also reprinted in *Feminist Review* 1988), Mohanty's "Under" becomes an important model for feminists speaking from different locations, talking across differences of opinion and using differential modes of analysis. The trouble emerges when Mohanty points out how the specific word 'colonisation' has come to denote "a variety of phenomena in recent feminist and left writings" from "a category of exploitative economic exchange in both traditional and contemporary Marxisms" to "its use by feminist women of color in the U.S. to describe the appropriation of their experiences and struggle by hegemonic white women's movements" (52). Understood in this fashion, the analytic and discursive definition of 'third world women' establishes a parallel between the experience of subjects hailing from countries once colonised in the nineteenth-century by European nations and that of subjects racialised within the logic of a white settler-nation. In both cases, the nation of origin, the non-Christian (or converted) religious affiliation, miscegenation, and association with slavery play a determining role in assigning social status. Mohanty suggests that economic factors are the defining integer in the racialisation of people around the world, whether it is through the anthropological and ethnographic imperative of the colonists to keep their imperial subjects under control or the racially segregating impulses of a New World cartography. But by subsuming the economic subtext of such exploitation under the rubric of colour, Mohanty and her co-theorists run the risk of an undifferentiated calibration of 'race' with identity. While "Under" was responding to the political issues confronting the American nation in the 1980's, a 'racial' framework of understanding histories of consciousness of human beings is highly problematic.

"Under" tries to perform the same kind of nuanced work that Mohanty had undertaken earlier with Biddy Martin in an essay titled "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got To Do With It?" In that essay, Martin and Mohanty had unsettled the notion that "there are discrete, coherent, and absolutely separate identities — homes within feminism, so to speak, based on absolute divisions between various sexual, racial, or ethnic identities" (192). They had refused to concede the territory of feminism to the West alone and challenged the hegemony of "culturalist arguments" by working out, with Minnie Bruce Pratt's essay, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," a complicated "relationship between home, identity, and community, that calls into question the notion of a coherent, historically continuous, stable identity and works to expose the political stakes concealed in such equations" (195). The argument in "What's Home" works because the writers base their analysis on a text, Pratt's essay, but more importantly, on the political idea of community and its limitations, rather than the abstract and affective one of identity. Also, the construction and questioning of 'home' allows Martin and Mohanty to enact a theoretically important moment of hotfooting: they accept Pratt's narrative that the "unsettling of any self-evident relation between blood, skin, heart" takes place "*without* dismissing the power and appeal of those connections" (200 emphasis mine).

The term 'woman of colour' that *TWW* uses so unquestioningly is finally revisited using the analytical lens of capitalism and not colonialism in an essay twenty years later. In 2002, Mohanty repeats and revises some of her central positions in an essay titled "'Under Western Eyes Revisited': Feminist Solidarity Through Anticapitalist Struggles," clarifying what exactly she meant by 'difference' in the initial essay. She adds a corrective to interpretations of her work where her specific delineations of 'difference' have been usurped by postmodernists to mean a generalized exploration of difference, to the exclusion of all general and/or universal claims. In the revision, Mohanty seeks to "recapture and reiterate" the fuller meaning of difference, which is "its connection to the universal" (505). This is a corrective that all identity categories might do well to remember: that the claim for the one, the particular, the specific is always made *in relation* to an universal. Repudiations of universalism actually leave the category intact, unless the universal is understood as the sign of the ethical in all its socio-political ramifications. Thus, the essential is needed in order to underscore the salience of the general as also offer the exception to the general.

In "Revisited," Mohanty sees "the politics and economics of capitalism" as the new (old) modality against which women have to organize (509). In the new world order of globalisation, the conflation of the terms 'third world women' and 'women of colour' becomes slippery and intangible, and it is interesting to me that Mohanty does not use the word 'women of colour' in her revised essay at all. Instead, she employs the word 'transnational' which is the new currency of access and mobility for scholars who once occupied the space of the 'third world' and the postcolonial. While Mohanty again justifies the historical uses of the binary Western/Third World, she now takes into account the criticism leveled against her by Radhika Mohanram, who critiques her for transposing an American paradigm of understanding difference on the rest of the world. Mohanram particularly points out the "differences between a 'multicultural' understanding of nation (prevalent in the United States) and a call for a 'bicultural' understanding of the nation on the part of indigenous peoples in Aotearoa/New Zealand" ("Revisited" 507). Mohanty accepts the charge and notes that "native or indigenous women's struggles, which do not follow a postcolonial trajectory based on the inclusions and exclusions of process of capitalist, racist, heterosexist, and nationalist domination, cannot be addressed easily under the purview of categories such as 'Western' and 'Third World'" (ibid). However, she now makes a troublesome declaration while marking the changes brought about in a globalised world, dividing its peoples into the North and the South and the One-Third/Two-Third worlds:

> Interestingly enough, while I would have identified myself as both Western and Third World – in all my complexities – in the context of "Under Western Eyes," in this new frame, I am clearly located within the One-Third World. Then again, now, as in my earlier writing, I straddle

> both categories. I am clearly a part of the social minority now, with all its privileges; however my political choices, struggles, and vision for change place me alongside the Two-Thirds World. Thus, I am for the Two-Thirds World, but with the privileges of the One-Third World. I speak as a person situated in the One-Third, but from the space and vision of, and in solidarity with, communities in struggle in the Two-Thirds World. (507)

Such a contention again obfuscates the mobility associated with travelling theorists who are of the privileged minority in *all* the spaces they occupy.

Waking from the Dream of a Common Language[20]:

> This universality of gender oppression is problematic, based as it is on the assumption that the categories of race and class have to be invisible for gender to be visible.
>
> Mohanty, "Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience."
> *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates.*

It is *vital* to note that the editors of *TWW* make the distinction between white women and women of colour in the United States and also see them as separate from women from third world countries, who rightly do not belong to the chromatic hierarchy (constructed on the 'single drop of blood' theory) of apparently naturalised race relations in white settler colonies. Mohanty points out correctly in her "Introduction" that 'race' and the construction of racialised relations have specialised, but separate, histories in the annals of European imperialism and settler-colonialism:

> Racism in the context of colonialism and imperialism takes the form of simultaneous naturalization and abstraction. It works by erasing the economic, political, and historical exigencies that necessitate the

> essentialist discourse of race as a way to legitimate imperialism in the first place.... Historically (white) feminist movements in the West have rarely engaged questions of immigration and nationality (one exception is Britain, which has a long history of black feminist organizing around such issues). In any event, I would like to suggest that analytically these issues are the contemporary metropolitan counterpart of women's struggles against colonial occupation in the geographical third world.
>
> (*TWW* 18, 23)

Mohanty here makes two important points. One, explicitly, that activism and organising against these discriminations makes 'race' a "political constituency, not a biological or even sociological one" (*TWW* 7), and two, more subtly, that such oppositional work is not necessarily a sign of equal struggles between different colonized peoples *all* over the world, but more exclusively an 'in'-conversation between metropolitan *speakers/analysts* of those inequities. Her inquiries are rooted in her "own discontinuous locations" as "a third world feminist trained in the U.S.": this is a crucial bit of information to register (3). I signal in my own "Introduction" that the question of colour and -worldism becomes acute in Anglo-North American scholarship, in ways that privilege the identity rather than the politics. Mohanty provides the proof to this statement when she later cites Elizabeth Higginbotham, who "defines racism as an ideology within which people of color in the United States have to live" (22), thus making clear the material conditions under which such scholarship is produced, disseminated and operative.

The stakes for a claim to the feminist nation are particularly high in the U.S. academy, including in its globally influential publishing power, and all feminist work generated here sooner or later is interpellated by racialised identity politics, white, black, yellow, red or brown, whether in their productive enquiries or cul-de-sac disavowals. This epistemological battlefield is where the national political ideology is reflected in all its multicultural complexity and performed in cahoots with its dominant cultural underpinnings. To cite Canadian scholar, Himani Bannerji:

> ... whereas the discourse of multiculturalism with its core concepts of diversity or difference have a general cross-border or transnational appeal, the related *agentic expression*, "women of colour" is primarily North American. Its use is not common in British feminist vocabulary, for example, where "black women" or "black and Asian women" are terms of choice. Also, women with African or aboriginal backgrounds do not readily respond to this name, as they consider themselves to have highly substantive cultural histories and special claims to the politicized notions of blackness and aboriginality." (16 emphasis mine)

I argue that the situation has changed radically in the case of South-Asian, Asian-American and Arab-American women (otherwise and previously known as 'third world women') in the 1990s[21], and in the case of Canada, the term 'woman of colour' has been quite a successful, unreflective American import, but Bannerji's claim about the provenance of the term nevertheless still holds water. More to the point, for the purposes of my examination of South Asian feminists in the postcolonial academy, I find our induction into the category of 'colour' particularly problematic given that our highly successful presence in the Anglo-North American institutions is mediated through a class-and-caste based privilege in our nations of origin as well as mastery over the global channels of knowledge in English.

Given the valourisation of third world woman in the US *academy* as the Other (in her postcolonial avatar) who *can* be tolerated, indeed is welcomed and given a negotiated place to speak from (as outlined in my chapter on Spivak), such an embrace of the category 'woman of colour' smacks, at best of ad hocism, and at worst, of opportunistic and skilled use of the master's tools. To succumb to and in fact *consent* to being interpellated by the dichotomous binary of racial appellates is sanctioned continuation of the ethnocentric logic of (neo-)imperialism. Third World women who come to Anglo-North America as educated immigrants and become part of the empowered diaspora of their nations of origin may be (indeed, are) discriminated against using the same material tools of home-grown racialisation, but the psychic effects are markedly different, given older and embedded histories of consciousness that the two groups have. To be flippant, it is as though all oppressed peoples in the world were asked to take on the label 'dalit' as their favoured term of endearment! The term 'dalit' (literally , Latin: 'downtrodden'), as we know, emerges from socio-political agitation in the Indian subcontinent to revolutionise and reform caste-based distinctions and discrimination against the outcastes and untouchables in the Hindu varna system. It has a place-and-time specific history (like 'apartheid' and 'the Holocaust' to mention other examples) that cannot and should not be deployed *loosely* in the struggle for epistemological equality and material justice. To do so would be to elide and erase the history of racialised oppression *both* in Anglo-North America and the various different Third World nations around the globe.

I am not denying the systemic webs of oppression enabled by the technology of race in colonial and neo-colonial societies, and yet I want to insist on the specificity of their experience and enactment in the aid of horizontal comradeships. I want to make clear the distinction between a politics of opposition to relational and interconnected networks of power in white-settler colonies and the policies and programs that enable, indeed encourage, the *utterance* of this sanctioned oppositional politics in multicultural, metropolitan spheres. The power to speak oppression via a subject position that incorporates the knowledge systems of a theoretical academy is what makes these intellectual radicals so valuable to identity contestations in the US. Third world academicians and theorists have been particularly susceptible to this zero-sum game, as made evident and famous in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's well-known fulminations around the question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Allow me to cite two other 'third world' feminists who make similar allegations.

In Canada, Himani Bannerji takes to task Mohanty and her co-editors in *TWW*, and another co-editor, Jacqui Alexander in *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, for not adequately problematising the category 'women of colour' in relation to class, which she sees as far more formative of social hierarchies in the U.S., linked as they are to interconnected histories of slavery, industrialisation and immigration (23-24). Bannerji contends that such "unselfconsciousness is possible because of the radicalization of this term, women of colour, by anthologies such as *Third World Feminism and the Politics of Feminism*" that demonstrate a more treacherous politics of "multiculturalism from below" which seeks to "use it for the creation of *a coalitional subject*, especially in the feminine" (25, 18 emphasis mine). Bannerji has harsher words for these "conjugated subjects" whose "cultural hybridity becomes a freeing discourse for subject construction which goes beyond the masculinized rhetoric of cultural nationalism or the fixity of a national identity" (19). In fact, this is where, Bannerji contends, "notions such as 'border' identity, a new public sphere and so on become central" (19) and are popularised by theorists like Alarçon, Wallace, Sandoval and others associated with anthologies like *Bridge*. I take up her broader analysis of 'women of colour' in the context of multiculturalism in relation to Sherene H Razack, another Canadian feminist, in the next chapter, but suffice it to say here that Bannerji's refusal to lose sight of 'class' in configurations of colour situates her far more accurately within postcolonial Marxist politics of knowledge production rather than U.S. identitarian ones, something that neither 'feminisms of colour' nor 'third world feminisms' can manage any longer, whatever their initial impulses might have been[22]. It is more in keeping with the scathing criticisms leveled by Spivak and Suleri at the marriage of postcolonialism and feminism, where "each term serves to reify the potential pietism of the other (Suleri 759):

> In the context of contemporary feminist discourse..., the category of postcolonialism must be read both as a free-floating metaphor for cultural embattlement and an almost obsolete signifier for the *historicity of race*. There is no available dichotomy that could neatly classify the ways in which such a redefinition of postcoloniality is necessarily a secret sharer in similar configurations of feminism's most vocal articulation of marginality, or the obsessive attention it has recently paid to the racial body. (Suleri, 759-60 emphasis mine)

Suleri particularly chides Trinh Minh-ha, bell hooks and Mohanty (sacred cows in the minefield of third-world theorizations and articulations of minority voices) for their "continued obsession with a white academy, with race as a professional attribute that can only reconfigure itself around an originary conception of whiteness" (765).

Mohanty is let off the hook relatively easily for participating in "the great game that claims to be the first narrative of what the ethnically constructed woman is deemed to want," but Suleri reserves her sharpest tongue-lashings for the "dangers represented by feminists such as hooks and Trinh" who finally "represent the profession as both their last court of appeal and the anthropological ground on which they conduct their field work" (760, 765). She continues, relentlessly, to press the charge that the alternative such theorists offer "is conceptually parochial and scales down the postcolonial condition in order to encompass it within North American academic terms" (765). This is a charge that I find myself hard-pressed to refute, especially since today, we find ourselves irrefutably in the last court of appeal where the representative politics of colour has devolved to a matter of numbers and statistics in academies and other solidly middle-class organisations. The project of decolonising the mind has been relegated to the back-bench of history and the textuality of the literary archive, while we, postcolonial scholars, third worlders and transnationals masquerading as women of colour seem to want only a place in the academy, in the latest tome from Routledge or the latest entry in *Signs*. As Spivak asks irately, pithily, in a two-paragraph article in the second issue of the new postcolonial journal, *Interventions*, "when were we oppositional?"

I agree with Bannerji, Suleri and Spivak that the hold the term 'women of colour' has on US (and now Canadian) feminist politics has directly to do with the platform for speech and power on subalternity it allows, nay forces. The blurring of historical conditions that specifically equated "women of colour with third world women as a mode for creating a 'viable oppositional alliance'" (Bannerji 24) has been a beautiful dream from which both parties have been rudely awakened, repeatedly, by a larger divisive politics of colour that uses affirmative action to continue the divide-and-rule policies of colonialism and perpetuate a competitive compartmentalisation of minority and 'special interest' groups. In this scenario, I acknowledge that the response of hegemonic white feminism has more often than not been apathetic, reactionary and self-serving. But it is time again perhaps to evaluate where the master's tools have taken us (as Bannerji urges us to do, with Angela Davis and Paula Moya). The pressure to dance to the tune of a politics of colour, this time, both by Anglo-American academics and self-identified feminists of colour, has become a contestatory duel-unto-death, whereby identity becomes the crucial "conceptual link between the public and the personal" (Bickford 313). This move has not only led to identity overshadowing politics, but has conflated "the professional model with one universal and world historical" (Suleri 766). This move has also inevitably, unsurprisingly, led to the contestations being enacted amongst the very groups that first united under umbrella coalitional terms like 'third world' and 'women of colour'. The next section traces the logical end to this journey along the road of colour.

Questions of Homes and Mappings:

In the beginning, third world feminism in the U.S. established close ties and parallel agendas with its local and national compañera, feminisms of colour. Today these constituencies are deeply divided as transnational theorists inhabit multiple locations and mediate in well-defined and well-defended national boundaries within a supposedly amorphous, borderless, globalised, capitalist world. Meanwhile feminisms of colour negotiate the relentless reifications and ramifications of an ever-evolving, hydra-headed definition of colour and racialisation on American terrain. Given this scenario, the conjunctions and conflicts between third world feminisms and feminisms of colour in the contemporary Anglo-American academy have revealed their fraternities and fractures in theoretical debates and public as well as national public policy sites.

A relative newcomer to this debate, I have been energised by the productive tensions between these two modes of social analysis and at the same time dismayed by the very successful *twin* silencing and smothering of their representative politics in an era where neo-imperial, neo-liberal and neo-conservative agendas have taken over the American nation. I say this very much as an outsider to the U.S., having never been allowed to set foot on that soil, but with the telescopic, comparative vision of one who has surveyed the terrain in two other multicultural, democratic nations: India and Canada. This debate is one pivot upon which my central thesis of hotfooting around essentialism turns. My analysis of the dialogues and disjunctures between third world feminisms and feminisms of colour in Anglo-North America problematises any essentialised notions of the categories. I offer instead the paradigm of the postcolonial nation as a lens through which a predominantly (and necessary) *historical* genealogy of these terms may be derived. What I call the 'postcolonial nation' is not just limited to territories once colonized by Europe that achieved their independence in the 1940s-60s. I am also referring to nations that feel the effects of postcoloniality, by virtue of being participants in a larger global movement of peoples and perspectives that question the segregated parameters of nineteenth century European imperialism, and by virtue of members of the erstwhile colonized nations traveling to new lands.

This chapter has traced a parallel morphology between the two terms, third world feminisms and feminisms of colour, since their inception and emergence in the late 1970s and early 1980s and examined their current circulation and purchase in an institutionalised setting marked and marred by identity politics. These decades witnessed the heated and productive debates in what have been variously known as mainstream or hegemonic feminisms, and indeed have changed the way that 'Feminism' once conceived of itself. It would not be an exaggeration to say that feminisms in the present and feminisms in the plural are the direct result of the conversations inflected by these two terms. However, the terms "third world women" and "women of colour" are the peculiar children of the feminist academy in the United States of America. They emerge from, garner particular force and assume valency in this site and undergo transformation when they are exported to other, different sites. In fact, when exported, they lose their specificity and acuity even in locations that might appear to be similar to them, for example in Canada and in Australia.

The terms 'woman of colour,' 'third world woman,' 'postcolonial' and 'transnational' feminist are useful sites of socio-political agency, awakening, consciousness and mobilisation. Given the racist and increasingly racialising culture from which they emerge, these terms may be necessary in order to claim voice and name to the ethos in which they operate and gain currency. However, twenty-five years after they made their appearance, I want to interrogate the salience of these labels and see if they offer hope and possibility for coalition-building in a fragmented women's movement. I wish to examine if labels born out of the binary discourse of colour are effective in combating the insidious presence of racism in hegemonic feminist (and other) theory. I want to ask, following Lorde, if the master's tools can indeed deconstruct the master's house, i.e. if postcolonial South Asian scholars who feel interpellated by the label 'women of colour' can work positively, constructively, and without psychic damage as they continue to use the nomenclature of colour that positions and fixes them within entrenched structures of race and racialisation.

Is it time to outgrow the strategic use and importance of the word 'colour' within the Anglo-American academy? Whether or not it is possible within multicultural nation states to dispense with the binary terms that posit as value-laden opposites the East and the West, the North and the South, the first and third worlds, the developed and the backward countries, the neutral white dominant and the marginalized person of colour, it is important to raise the theoretical question: is it possible to imagine a psycho-social way of reconfiguring these distinctions in feminism without resorting to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak would call "chromatism" and Himani Bannerji "colour as the cognate of race"?

Endnotes

[1] Extra national refers to those diasporic bodies and sensibilities which do double duty in how they operate outside the borders of the country of origin as well as how they function within the nation of adoption. In the first case, they are interpellated by the foundational national myths of blood and belonging and their reception/acceptance in the country of origin is mediated by their response to the same, while at the same time being incorporated into the modern success story of transnationality and globalisation; in the second, they are the 'strangers within the borders' who are made to stand in for the Other even as they narrate multiple stories of the multicultural nation. In both cases, diaspora is not cause for a celebration of the transcending of nationhood; to the contrary, diaspora proclaims the triumph of the nation-state in many different, complex ways in which it is hailed by the two spheres of influence.

[2] U.S. feminists who have called for the inclusion of race as an essential paradigm of postcolonial scholarship include Malini Johar Schueller, Sandra K Soto, Mari Matsuda etc. Postcolonial feminists who have engaged with these debates include Fawzia Afzal-Khan, Vilashini Cooppan, Mary E John, Ranjana Khanna, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, Falguni Sheth, etc.

[3] Anita Sheth and Amita Handa express this very well in "A Jewel in the Frown: Striking Accord Between India/n Feminists": "Our coming to consciousness about our racial oppression has largely been delivered by Black feminist activists. When we read Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Michele Wallace, Barbara Smith, June Jordan, Linda Carty, Peggy Bristow, Dionne Brand, Makeda Silvera, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker — truly the list goes one — we come to understand the pain and injustice of, and resistance to, white supremacist oppression and

exploitation, and learn about how this hateful practice of racism, colonialism and imperialism is put together and managed daily. We thus also find in their words an entry point to talk about ourselves, our exclusions, our struggles. We realize that as feminists working towards an anti-racist project, we have not understood our particular experiences as India/ns; we have not drawn on our particular histories of oppression, domination and resistance. Through their work, we have had access to South Asian feminists, like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Punam Khosla, Himani Bannerji, Nirmala Bannerji, Partha Chatterjee, Pratibha Parmar, Lata Mani, Chandra Mohanty, Kum Kum Bhavnani, Swasti Mitter. While we have been exposed to the historical subordination of India/n women by India/n men and to the subordination of all India/s in general by the white British, we have not found points of entry to discuss the particular prejudices and privileges that we as India/s in general and India/ns from a particular class have in relation to the spectrum of non-white people." (in Himani Bannerji ed. *Returning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism and Politics*. Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1993. 39-40)

[4] Vilashini Cooppan repeats Michael Omi and Howard Winant's caution of this thesis, that because colonial paradigms "reason by analogy, they cannot range over the uniqueness and complexity of American racial ideology or politics" (10) (qtd. from *Racial Formation in the United States*. New York: Routledge, 1994).

[5] Mohanty describes her current work in the U.S. as operative under the sign of the 'alien': she testifies that "rather obstinately," she has "refused to give up" her "Indian passport" and chooses to "remain a resident alien in the U.S." ("Crafting" 493).

[6] See Falguni A Sheth. "The Technology of Race: Enframing, Violence, and Taming the Unruly." *Poiesis: Radical Philosophy Review*.

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[7] I am not refuting biological modes of racial classification: as far as methods of categorisation go, this has a place in the history of twentieth-century science. I am obviously looking at a lay person's interpretation of its terms and the legal uses that have been made of it. The U.S. legal classification of Indians contrasts with the anthropological racial classification system developed by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840) in which Indians were deemed Caucasian. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racial_classification_of_Indian_Americans> In their own understanding, and through the traditions of Sanskritic scholarship and Indology, northern 'Indians' trace their origins to the 'Mediterranean type' and the Aryan colonization of 1900s B.C. Southern Indians, on the other hand, are deemed a hybrid of proto-Australoids, the predominant inhabitants of the subcontinent after the Negrito settlers circa 3000 B.C. (Dilip Hiro ed. *The Rough Guide History of India*, 2002). All this classification testifies not only to the intransient nature and intangibility of 'race' as a method of tracing origins, but also to the familiarity of subcontinentals with complex forms of identity making, racialisation being only one method.

[8] Now this equation is further complicated by immigrants from ex-British colonies like Singapore and Hong Kong.

[9] See "Cross-Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, 'Postcoloniality,' and the Politics of Location." in Smadar Lavie & Ted Swedenberg eds. *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996. 273-93.

[10] Immigrants from newly independent African nation states get interpellated by pan-Africanism, a development that is now being questioned by many scholars from the continent, who speak of a hierarchy between descendants of slaves in the U.S. and people from the old continent. It is a hierarchy that cuts both ways.

On the one hand, routes to power are more open to the established blacks of the U.S., and on the other, newer people from Africa have a 'more authentic' claim on their ancestry and heritage, as well as higher stakes in postcoloniality. This is a very simplistic explanation of course of what is a multifaceted issue of being and belonging.

[11] See Philomena Okeke-Ihejirika's "Contesting Identities of Color: African Female Immigrants in the Americas" In *Color Struck: Essays on Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective*, ed. V Williams Hettie (University Press of America, forthcoming December 2007, pp 1-14) and "The Second Coming: African Women as a Racialized Transmigrant Group in a Canadian Context." In *Resisting Racism and Xenophobia: Global Perspectives in Race, gender, and Human Rights*, ed. Faye V Harrison (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2005, 175-189). Also see Alana C Hackshaw's "Black Ethnicity and Racial Community: African-Americans and West Indian Immigrants in the United States." In *Constructing borders/crossing boundaries : race, ethnicity, and immigration*, ed. Caroline B. Brettell. Lanham, MD : Lexington Books, c2007.

[12] There is an interesting study waiting to be done on how the religious language and trope of 'conversion' have inflected social movements; Gauri Viswanathan's recent work on Buddhism and B R Ambedkar in India being one such example.

[13] Speaking about "the underrepresentation of Native women in *Bridge*" as not being particularly anomalous, Deborah A Miranda asks of her "sisters of colour": "I ask, remember the differences between indigenous and diasporic; between indigenous and exile; between still-colonized native and freed slave; between *choosing* education as a way to speak, and having literacy shoved down your throat in a boarding school far from home, beaten into you." ("'What's Wrong

with a Little Fantasy?': Storytelling from the (Still) Ivory Tower." in Gloria E Anzaldua & AnaLouise Keating eds. *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*. London & New York: Routledge, 2002. 193, 200.)

[14] For example, the anonymous writer of "For My Sister: Smashing the Walls of Pretense and Shame" wonders "what it would be like for us all to speak more openly of the most secretive things about our own communities" (home 295). S/he further elaborates: "There seems to exist a general lack of priority among class-privileged South Asian Americans regarding the building of a sense of solidarity and community with people in the working class and other people of colour. This lack of community hurts us all, sister: we lose contact with a piece of our own humanity in the process of playing the capitalist game. The suicides of our young adults, people who are newcomers to the 'game,' testify to this loss" (295-96). Of course she is speaking of the second generation of the diaspora, but the culpability and conscientisation of the first streams of immigrants cannot be evaded either. (in Gloria E Anzaldua & AnaLouise Keating eds. *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*. London & New York: Routledge, 2002. 295-301)

[15] See my Introduction to the thesis as well as "Wa(i)ving it All Away: Feminists of Colour" in Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie & Rebecca Munford eds. *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*. Houndsmills & Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp 205-15. (forthcoming reprint with revised preface in 2007).

[16] This example is also an instance of the supremacy of the U.S. publishing regimes on feminist scholarship. Depending on their areas of interest, other feminists could, with equal accuracy, cite Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak or Judith Butler or Toril Moi as being 'most cited' authors.

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[17] Answering the question, "Why Feminism?" in her "Introduction" to *TWW*, Mohanty says that the "term *feminism* is itself questioned by many third world women. Feminist movements have been challenged on the grounds of cultural imperialism, and of short-sightedness in defining the meaning of gender in terms of middle-class, white experiences, and in terms of internal racism, classism, and homophobia.... [A] critique of first world feminism [distinguishes] between a limited, liberal "women's rights" focus and a more productive "feminism as philosophy" focus" (7-8).

[18] Numerous feminists have pointed out how the term 'feminist' is created as a label for 'Western' women as a subjecthood of emancipation and liberation, and is used to actively constitute women from undeveloped and non-Western world as primitive and oppressed.

[19] Cecily Devereux, literary critic and Canadian feminist, makes an important distinction between postimperial and postcolonial nations and sensibilities.

[20] From Adrienne Rich's collection of poems, taken as the slogan for a universal, global and all-encompassing feminist sisterhood and solidarity. *The Dream of A Common Language: Poems 1974-1977*. New York & London: W W Norton, 1978.

[21] Please see Mervat's article about the 'women of colour' consciousness of Arab-American women in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

[22] See Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge's companion pieces, "What is Postcolonialism?" (1991) and "What Was Postcolonialism?" (2005) for a re-configuration of the still-urgent, but unfinished project of postcolonialism using Marxist analyses.

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Thinking through Visibility: Two 'Minority' Feminists in Canada: Himani Bannerji and Sherene H Razack

> In 1971, Canada was the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy. By so doing, Canada affirmed the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation. The 1971 Multiculturalism Policy of Canada also confirmed the rights of Aboriginal peoples and the status of Canada's two official languages.
>
> "Canadian Multiculturalism: An Inclusive Citizenship." *Canadian Heritage*.2007.

> The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." The visible minority population includes the following groups: Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Japanese, Korean and Pacific Islander.
>
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This chapter is thematically linked with the previous one through three strands: 1) the concept of a class consciousness that defines contemporary educational migrants who trace their origins to the Indian subcontinent, 2) the idea of identities that pre-exist and continue after migration, 3) the shaping of a feminist subject in the face of immigration and multicultural policies in Anglo-North America. The direct subjects of analysis in this chapter are Himani Bannerji and Sherene H Razack, immigrant women from India & Pakistan[1] and Trinidad & Tobago, who inhabit the space of Canadian academe as Marxist and transnational feminists respectively. Both profess an anti-colonial, anti-racist politics as well as an equivocal, evolving relationship with the label 'women of colour'. They are also bodies constructed as visible minorities in the Canadian nation-state.

In trying to think through the emergence of a race and feminist consciousness among South Asian postcolonial theorists in white-settler nations like the U.S., Canada and Australia, I am intrigued by the notion of visibility as a waystop in their journey of politicisation. I am interested in their move from one kind of hierarchical, multicultural, heterogeneous society where they are marked in particular ways (not necessarily 'visible' at all), to another where they are marked 'visibly' in relation to whiteness. In this new space, their perceptions and politics shift radically in terms of their self-implication and identification in hegemonic social relationality. In coming into a diasporic existence, postcolonial bodies lose their ready and available access to long, sustained and substantial histories of being and belonging to a particular social order. Alienated from the key to their subjectivities and finding their habitual[2] ways of being out of place in the new world, they spend a long time and not inconsiderable energy trying to render intelligent and translate their 'selves' in a hostile and disinterested place. The postcolonial project of knowledge making thus tries to set the record straight in a dominant, metropolitan global order. In coping with the loss of inherited histories of being, these bodies come to acquire other voices and subjectivities that try to restore a previous sense of wholeness, however mythical, in a new vocabulary of agency, identity and collectivity. This does not mean that hierarchy, heterogeneity and contradiction were not part of the older order, but that the new dominant order does not care for or willfully disregards these older histories of its 'alien' citizenry. Here the project of a revisionist, restorative history takes on legal, judicial and epistemological contours and colours in socio-political and institutional arenas, but still fails (as it must) to re-/address the original 'loss' of self.

I am only now beginning to work through these questions, after a few initial years of being interpellated as a 'woman of colour' and positing faith in that position as the only way to emerge out of an imposed, violent and unacceptable trap of racial marking and scarring. In this journey of self-identification, I hailed Gloria E Anzaldúa and Himani Bannerji as my beacons and guides. Interestingly, today, as I change my mind about the potential of woman-of-colour feminism to transform our social relations of being (experience being *only* a launching point for a larger analysis), I again find the *same* theorists useful in this *bildungsroman*. The printed text has remained the same, but my pencil underscorings in their books attest to different moments in reading, different lenses of interpretation. What is even more curious, but maybe not surprising, is that, in a similar fashion, many South Asian postcolonial scholars have come to completely opposed and contradictory conclusions using the very same foundational (or Enlightenment) texts. My slow and systematic 'discovery' of them has been an active politics of solidarity in reading. I do not relate this process as a simply, naively, autobiographical event in my narrative; rather this piecing together of why, how and when nodes of information flow to, and make sense for, us is a pivotal constituent in the process of consciousness-raising and race conscientisation that I talk about in the previous chapter.

Even though both Bannerji and Razack work in the same Canadian nation-state and offer critiques of multiculturalism through anti-colonial, anti-racist politics, their perspectives and standpoints differ and speak intimately to their formative years of awareness and articulation in their politics. I am interested not only in the explicit formulations they offer but also in the hidden and opaque aspects of their subject formation, especially with regards to a professed identity, be it racial, culturalised or classed. My method in this chapter is to look at the critical inventories of their selves as well as their itineraries of academic travel as they carve out a transnational space between here and there, and go about unsettling relations of power and negotiating ways of belonging in this settler-nation and that originary one. Like some other postcolonial theorists that I have read, Bannerji arrives at a dialectical position through the Marxist route, where she reads subjectivity through capitalism and negotiates an anti-racist methodology in the ideology/hegemony grid, while Razack comes to her oppositional politics through a Foucauldian interpretation of power, filtering the (ab)uses of governmentality and domination via the scopic lens of a regulatory, disciplinary, totalitarian and sovereign regime of looking. Alongside in their diverse paths, I am just now starting to *intuit* the deeply embedded psychic stimuli that impact upon their journeys in enmeshed geographical, historical, political, social and economic webs of knowledge and disclosure. But despite the exhaustive documentations of these journeys in social history, cultural story-telling and literature, and the reasons given thereof in postcolonial, diasporic and transnational theories, the psychic and affective imperatives behind the acquiring, adopting and avowing of a particular identity type, *and not another*, elude full comprehension.

In Canada, a class-mediated, state-sanctioned, management-type social activism and agency is the context in which both Bannerji and Razack start working within academia and the feminist community. They both offer critiques of multicultural settler-nation policies, but come to opposite conclusions about being subject to the regime of official, statist 'visible minority' making: Bannerji rejects any affective affiliation with the term 'woman of colour' while Razack argues for the creation of a 'brown space' within the academy. I am curious about how this happens, and why coming from other formative geo-political places and psychic realms, they 'acquire' — *or not* — a racial self in post-migratory institutional and social sites. Why and how do they use certain identifications, as 'woman of colour,' 'anti-racist' or 'feminist,' in order to delineate a specific politics of visibility, while (re-)actively or perforce erasing older modalities of being and histories of consciousness? Why does the contingency of being *here* supersede or subsume ways of being and consciousness *there* in the diasporic condition[3]? What happens to that other, hidden life of their psyches and beings in their new work?

Before I start with my readings of Bannerji's and Razack's work, I would like to offer a brief explanation of how the state-instituted term "visible minority" directly led to the creation of non-white and women of colour feminism in Canada. According to Linda Carty and Dionne Brand, "visible minority" women are basically a "creation of the Canadian state" (*Returning the Gaze*, referred to as *RG* hereafter, 169). They consider the label to be a discriminatory classification of "Native, South Asian, Black, Chinese and other non-white groups of women as qualitatively aberrant and quantitatively homogenous," leading to an "implicit hierarchical structuring of women" but "void of any race or class recognition and, more importantly, of class struggle or struggle against racism" (ibid). They categorically state that since "their racial [or class] histories cannot be unified," it is absurd to lump all these women in the same category.

Carty and Brand recall the 1981 National Conference of Immigrant Women organized by the federal government, leading to the institution of the National Immigrant Women's Network, Ontario Immigrant Women's Network, Race Relations Divisions of Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Ontario Women's Directorate, all of which were soon mired in bureaucracy, run by "women of middle class background" and turned into "social agencies," thereby detracting from the "grassroots" beginnings of the women's movement in Canada (*RG* 170, 173). Carty and Brand see the subsequent establishment of the National Conference on Immigrant and Visible Minority Women and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women as a "conduit of legitimation" for an advanced capital state that "does not operate within the interest of the working class" (*RG* 178, 170). They contend that it is precisely because of their "vaunted representation of all women and... diversity of... member organizations, [that they typify] the liberal-democratic discourse within advanced capitalism of co-existence being possible despite opposing views (*RG* 178). Finally, they note that "all this activity has not occurred in isolation but amidst a growing atmosphere of political and economic conservatism of the state itself and undeniably even of the electorate" (*RG* 180). We may compare and contrast these federal initiatives in Canada fruitfully with the 'grassroots' level conferences held around the same time in the U.S. that inaugurated much of the conversation between feminists of different constituencies south of the 49th parallel and gauge their institutional and social fallouts (1981: "National Women's Studies Association: Women Respond to Racism" and 1982: "Common Differences: Third World Women and Feminist Perspectives").

Himani Bannerji: "doing time" in "a separate sky"

> Gone are the days
> when I had a 'private' private life – when a bad love
> affair hurt me more than the newspaper in the morning.
> 'You have no personal life anymore?' you say shaking
> your head ever so little. No, I don't. It's a kind of luxury
> this personal life. And besides, as Ruth First said, before
> they blew her to bits, in her 117 days, personal life is
> constructed with a personal history, personal tokens,
> which you give up at the warden's office as you enter,
> and wear the clothes that others do. Yes, I have no
> personal life – but then again, don't I? I have become so
> many people. *Shakti's Words* 8.

The phrases "doing time" and "a separate sky" are the titles of Bannerji's poetry collections, her earliest, experiential work in Canada that speaks to the journey of arrival in an alternative geography of being from Calcutta, India, to Toronto, Canada, via London, England. Like the other South Asian migrant academic intellectuals in this dissertation, Bannerji too maps out an exilic position in relation to her nation of origin and retains a more political than affective engagement with her country of domicile. And domicile it is, as she remarks how despite spending half her life in Toronto, she is "coming no nearer and going no further than [she] did in the first few years" (*Unsettling Relations*, referred to as *UR* hereafter, 7). She speaks of "the public and private parts" of her self refusing "to connect in a meaningful formulation" in Canada (*Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism,* referred to hereafter as

TT 97-98). The reasons for this "arc, suspended" and "distanced" become elaborated in the series of essays she writes during this period (*ibid*).

Bannerji dates her entry into Canadian academe to 1969, two years before the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed, and after a four-year stint of teaching English Literature as tenured faculty in India (*UR* 72). Her relationship to the Anglo-North American institutional space is literally one of biding and 'doing time', as she recounts the experience of being indirectly "pushed out" of the "universal culture" of English literary and cultural spaces at the University of Toronto, where "no one thought of [her] – *for or against* — in any real way (*UR* 68, 69 emphasis mine)[4]. She expands on this psycho-social, and more importantly for me, intellectual alienation in one of her earliest Canadian essays, "But Who Speaks for Us?: Experience and Agency in Conventional Feminist Paradigms":

> Deprived of a general sense of social belonging, of being a comfortable user of the *local cultural grammar*, divided by my gender, race and *marxism*, I was an "outsider" in and to my discipline and the classrooms that I inhabited. Often I was the only non-white student in these classes.... Wading through trivia, fluent in English, but not in aestheticized colonialese, I searched for ways to understand what was happening to me and whether or how it also happened to others.
>
> (*UR* 69, 70 emphasis mine)

Bannerji spends the next twenty years to commensurate employment, i.e. Canadian tenure, seeking clues to the 'ways of knowing' and 'producing knowledge' as a 'social' event, in form as well as content. First, she "drops out" of English literary studies, concentrates on writing poetry, political-cultural criticism, and then articulates herself to the women's movement in Toronto. But in the last, she discovers herself relegated to the "separate category of sub-women — 'immigrant,' 'visible minority,' 'ethnic,' 'black,' later 'women of colour,'" denied voice, and subjected again to "the subtle cruelty of intellectual racism and colonialism" (*UR* 71, 70). The one, and great, gain for Bannerji is meeting like-minded young black women, whose poetry and politics named the condition of their reality as racism, and in solidarity with whom Bannerji finds a mirror of and "legitimacy" for her anger in "the great political metaphor" of the time: blackness (*UR* 73). She 'discovers' the revolutionary histories and heroes of the Third World, particularly Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Aimé Cesaire, C L R James, and the Black Panther theorists, especially the letters of George Jackson, who spell out "a shared culture and politics of resistance" that enables her to take up the "identity politics of self-naming and self-empowerment" (*TT* 9)[5]. Never again would she interpret Marx, whom she had read in India, in the same way, without the anti-colonial filter. Bannerji takes strength from the word "Black," then "a political metaphor[6] rather than territorial politics," in order to curse and combat the "violence and trauma" of what was happening to her, by means of what Dorothy E Smith calls "what actually happens" in *The Everyday World as Problematic* (*TT* 9, 11, 13). In fact, reading these texts help her to identify, understand and *name* her experience as entrenched, systemic racism. This is similar to the process of conscientisation Mohanty and others have undergone; however, the methodological and ideological departures in Bannerji's politics become evident quite soon[7].

Bannerji's impassioned defense of identity politics at this time is a "situated critique" that arises from her "sense of self in the world... [and] always in history" (*TT* 13). It is on behalf of those who have been silenced as a "People Without History, and thus people without names of their own choosing" (*TT* 20). Her characterisation of "cultural political" identities as "*named agency*" is a very important intervention for understanding the strategic essentialisms of these people as invested in and "central to their historical subjectivity" (*TT* 19 emphasis mine). The psychic import of such acts becomes clear in the essay, "The Sound Barrier: Translating Ourselves in Language and Experience," where Bannerji tries to "retrieve, represent and document" the fragments of her own diasporic existence in some translations of, and textual allusions to, classical Bengali literature. Trying to explain the salience of her mother tongue to her sense of being, she *gropes towards* (her favourite verb) a language that will illustrate and illuminate her history. The texts she chooses to cite from and reconstruct in fragments of memory are suffused with "politics and romantic-sexual emotions" of the Bengali literature of her childhood and youth that posit love for the newly-independent nation as "mother and motherland" (*TT* 175). Only later does she realise this "conscious ideological project" of the creation of herself, and others like her, as "gender-and-class organized" (ibid). But in those initial intensely traumatic moments of immigrant alienation and angst, she can only give voice to an "emptying out as well as blocking... of our social being" by the "Ministry of Multiculturalism and the various containment agencies of this country" (*TT* 178).

Bannerji understands her "'new world' of cultural production" to be marked by a "singular disinterest about us or the societies we come from" and "the historical separation of our worlds" (*TT* 165). This lack of curiosity on the part of the assimilation-minded dominant community is a deliberate as well as sanctioned non-seeing, which then is combined with the other, official, visible regime of looking. Such a contradictory way of being asked to explain itself in the world produces anxious schizophrenia in the divided migrant self, now called a 'visible minority'. The desire thus to "say it all and be mute at the same time" is produced by the constant, repetitive and *failed* acts of "self-translation" that ensure for Bannerji, and others like her, "a permanent mediator's and interpreter's role" in a dominant sphere that has neither any shared memory of their history nor any interest or investment in trying to know it (*TT* 164, 165)[8]. But in her hands, a need for "self-expression and self-reification," circumscribed by the intimacy of her vernacular mother-tongue, Bengali, on the one hand, and the master-language and discourse of English on the other, is not just a tool in the service of validating the angst-ridden alienation or subaltern pietism of the privilege-stripped[9] migrant intellectual. Instead, it turns into a vantage point to start examining her own "class world" in Bengal and the "interior world of home, hearth and Bengali" that divided her from her fellow-beings, the "poor rural and urban people of both sexes" from the "public world outside... of earning money, achievement, success and English" (*TT* 173).

At the moment of becoming aware of the "binary arrangement of identities... in a racist-imperialist definition" of the developed world, Bannerji becomes acutely conscious of the underdeveloped world left behind, in which people like her knew, and were schooled early on, that "the way to advancement lay through proficiency in English and collaboration with Colonial State and Western capital" (*TT* 175). Thus a significant, sober qualification and re-consideration of identity-politics accompanies her unequivocal defense of the same even this early on:

> The overwhelming preoccupation with what "they say we are" and "what we are not," our "otherization" by "them" precludes much exploration or importance of who we really are.
>
> Who we are should be a historical/memorial and re-constructive excursion heralding a new content and new forms out of the very problems created by dislocation or fragmentation. *Leaving this part of our lives depoliticized, dismissing it simply as "cultural" politics, in refusing to incorporate these experiential and subjective terms into the "world of anti-racist politics," can lead to forms of silencing, imitative exercises, wearing masks of other struggles.*
>
> A whole new story has to be told, with fragments, with disruptions, and with self-conscious and critical reflections. And one has to *do it right*. Creating seamless narratives, engaging in exercises in dramatic plot creating, simply make cultural brokers, propagators of orientalism and self-reificationists out of us.
>
> (*TT* 178-79 emphasis mine)

Bannerji embarks on the task of narrating other stories soon after, but first I want to touch upon another part in this tale of identity-politics. Just as it is important to acknowledge the ways in which Bannerji comes to recognise herself in the revolutionary politics of the third world[10], it is equally crucial to pay attention to her fear of "loss of self" experienced in conventional feminist circles, a space where she expected to recognise herself and be recognised as an equal member of a gendered solidarity. Entering the metropolitan space of Anglo-North America is, for Bannerji, as for many others (including this writer), also an entry into the highly demarcated, enunciated, institutionalised and polarised space of 'feminist' politics. Given the European Enlightenment articulation of patriarchy as a binary between mind and body, self and other, masculine and feminine, feminism here becomes a kind of territorial staking and indoctrination that takes no prisoners, 'undecided' or wavering, despite its promise of 'free' sisterhood and emancipation. Here, the questioning of the relations of ruling can take place through a polemical war-between-the-sexes type of crusade against patriarchy, enmeshed with the pervasive and "discrete oppressions" of imperialism, neo-colonialism and racism, but divorced from any Marxian "sensuous, human, practical activities" (*TT* 14)[11]. In this war, "the word 'woman' takes on a conceptual/categorical status encoding patriarchal social relations which are viewed as substantive structures" (*TT* 50).

This foregrounding of 'woman' as an entity unaffected by other social networks of power is not possible in the sub-continent[12]. There, females availed themselves of the great privilege and luxury of socially-embedded freedoms, public, personal, suffrage-related and educational, in varying degrees of class-and-caste-inf(l)ected encounters with self-governance, independence and modernity, *without necessarily being constructed as women*. Coming from such a differently structured social scenario, in which women did not have to fight for their rights *solely as women*, even as they acquiesced to, struggled against or interrogated the inequalities of a patriarchal hierarchy[13], Bannerji finds the articulation of feminism in Canada emptied of its "general social context, content and dynamism" (*TT* 49). Instead, she notes that by 1975, "the discourse of gender, professionalism and mobility had asserted itself in the university" (*TT* 42). She discovers that in this "competitive and punishing pluralism" of liberal politics, "all are women, but some are more women than others"

(Orwell qtd. *UR* 71). Out of place[14], out of context, Bannerji and her politics do not have a space yet in the situated feminist struggles of the advanced capitalist world. Remember that even till 1983, women like her are denied *any*, let alone "full editorial control over the production of an issue" of *Fireweed*, a Canadian feminist magazine, which could "explore" their lives or analyse the larger political issues within the community (*Fireweed* 6). Bannerji and fellow managing editors, Makeda Silvera and Nila Gupta, of the special number (16) titled "The Issue is 'Ism: Women of Colour Speak Out" gesture towards this 'problem' in 1983, when they are approached by its previously reluctant editorial board to throw light upon immigrant women's 'problems.' This ground-breaking moment in Canada's feminist publishing history is no doubt a result of the 1981 federal government-initiated drive that Carty and Brand refer to (*TT*42).

The gaining of a 'woman' consciousness or a feminist self comes at the cost of other, equally vital components of one's sense of being in this world. The articulation of a feminist 'identity' perforce has to be made *in exclusion to* any other, competing and divisive identities. As many third world, postcolonial, black and women-of-colour scholars have explained, the very production of the category 'woman' is an *identity* position that has to be ideologically constructed and hegemonically maintained.[15] The only possible way of speaking out against entrenched patriarchal relations of ruling in the global North/West seems to be by *declaring* oneself as a feminist.[16] Such a blanket declaration entails the denial of any other kind of resistance to patriarchy, e.g. in the social movements of the third world. This explains the virulent opposition to, and negative labeling of, all other political projects as a suspect 'identity politics' in mainstream 'Western' feminist theorising. As Bannerji attests, "controversies over International Women's Day, which [she] celebrated with fervour, conveyed to [her] the astounding revelation that imperialism was not a "women's issue'" (*UR* 71). I am conscious here of repeating what are now deemed to be 'taken-care-of' *topics* in contemporary feminisms, but this re-inventing of the wheel takes place through a continual, exhausting cycle in the struggle for equality of voice and representation in immigrant and Other women's politicisation and conscientisation *as feminists* in the global North/West.

Trouble is naturally exacerbated in 'feminist' circles where the new, foreign, alien and illegal entrants have to prove their credentials and present their 'woman' card to enter the club[17]. For those who refuse or are unable to leave their 'other' coats, hats and reticules at the door, the choice is either to be subject to the normative, disciplinary strictures of an inner circle or to be accused of causing breaches and dykes in the wider boundary wall against men in patriarchy[18]. As Ien Ang in "I'm a Feminist but... 'Other' Women and Postnational Feminism" (1995) and Rey Chow in "When Whiteness Feminizes... Some Consequences of a Supplementary Logic" (1999) have argued, it is in this normative construction of who constitutes a 'woman' that the 'feminist' club acts as a nation with its attendant technologies of gate-keeping and surveillance mechanisms of insider and outsider norms of behaviour and codes of belonging. Brand in Canada too talks about the implicit "feminist nationalism" in the women's movement, which she interestingly likens to the Black Power movement of the '60s and '70s, where the differentiation was not made in terms of class, but where she "saw the entire race moving in some direction" that just wanted "a piece of the stuff, a piece of the action" (*Fireweed* 15).

Disillusioned with the simultaneous imposition of and exclusion from feminist discourse, "resenting entrepreneurialism, lacking a space for developed intellectual work and with a smoldering anger," Bannerji moves to the disciplinary space of sociology at the Ontario Institution for Secondary Education. This proves to compound her gender trouble as she collides head-on with her "body as a political signifier" in the "prevailing racist common sense" and the monopolised feminist "aggression" of the '70s, despite the egalitarian promise of conventional Marxism and, more disappointingly, Marxist feminism (*UR* 72). Continued "'otherizing' social relations and exclusionary intellectual modes" in spaces Bannerji thought she could lay claim to were still operating at the level of *naming* racism rather than constituting it as "an integral part of the economic analysis" (*UR* 74, 88). It is no surprise that Bannerji starts her academic writing career by declaring the "university as a site of feminist struggles" with her co-contributors, Linda Carty, Kari Dehli, Susan Heald and Kate McKenna, in *Unsettling Relations*, where they explore the relations of ruling that influence and determine the ways in which non-privileged bodies inhabit and intrude upon the space of academe. This book is published in 1991, but chronicles the numerous and painful years that the contributors spent as outsiders in the teaching machine where their presence was remarked upon, questioned, unnoticed and dismissed, all at the same time. It is a deliberate profession of their desire to disrupt, unsettle, politicise and transform the relations of power in sites where, significantly, they have to declare and re-iterate that they have "*chosen to work as feminists*" (*TT* 6 emphasis mine). Despite their different journeys of arrival, and differing political affiliations, all the contributors understand their *methodologies* as feminist and therefore wish to take their rightful place at the table. The caveat to this declaration is also to historically and specifically "locate" the "category" of "woman" and not take it as normal or given (*UR* 10).

I first encountered Bannerji's work on identity, difference, agency and subjectivity in 1999, just a year into my graduate studies in Canada. I had come from New Delhi to Edmonton to work on postcolonial Indian women's publishing houses, translation practices and ideas of nationality. Many of the 'experiential' moments recounted by Bannerji in the essays that I quote from, at length, above, ""But Who Speaks for Us?: Experience and Agency in Conventional Feminist Paradigms" and "The Passion of Naming: Identity, Difference and Politics of Class," seemed to mirror my own feelings of silencing and disenfranchisement within 'the feminist' community[19], even though I felt completely in my element in academic discussions of postcolonialism[20]. I was surprised and dismayed at how the social and institutional milieu could have remained unchanged in the *thirty* years between her arrival and mine. I was struck in particular by one sentence in the "Introduction" to *Thinking Through*, where Bannerji talks about reading "feminist theories soon after" she came to Canada and then being assailed by "a continual sense of non-belonging, a confused silence produced in places that should have been also [hers], because they politically proclaimed so in their posters and publications" (*TT* 8). This sentence seemed an accurate summation of my experiences at the site of the university particularly. Like her, I found myself split between my 'being' and my 'world', terrified of losing my 'self' in "adult regression," and started "attending to politics" in order to gather up "some coherence" for myself (*TT* 11, 8). Thus in her, I found the authorisation for my own 'experience' and subsequent conscientisation. I don't think it would be inaccurate to say that the many South Asian scholars and students who come to the Anglo-North American academic space undergo similar experiences. In quest of knowledge, they/we find politics[21].

I find Bannerji particularly enabling in my own thinking through the practices of naming, claiming and then disavowing a particular kind of identity politics. It is important for me that the discriminatory practices in the Marxist feminist community led Bannerji neither to the essentialist school of Kate Millet, Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer (sex/gender/power) nor to the pluralist identity politics of difference and diversity espoused by Sandra Harding, Toril Moi, Elizabeth Spelman, bell hooks or Trinh T Minh-ha (*UR* 78, 103). Even as I found myself being schooled in certain feminist ways of reading, I too have come around to thinking that the struggle for 'feminist' equity in the academy is not a plea for women's equality in a larger social arena, but rather an attempt to consolidate one's inherited, achieved, worked-towards and hard-won *class position* in the global *knowledge economy* (where the Anglo-North American university system is the highest, most competitive and influential stakeholder in the game). Wanting and gaining access to this space, which is a crucial index of the transformations in the wider outside world, is *not at all* an empty, shallow, suspect or unnecessary quest; in fact it is critical to work towards the equal representation of bodies and knowledges in academe if we want to rethink how the university as a producer of citizens of tomorrow will function in a truly equitable and global way. But we need to *name* this quest for what it is, i.e. as upward mobility and control over the means of knowledge production, *in addition* to all its transformative potential. We need to interrogate and examine *why* and in what manner we want access to this force field. Instead of succumbing to the management model of diversity /difference representation (i.e. of the Other), there has to be an acute, incisive and historically informed thinking and knowing about how these diverse bodies/knowledges came to be in these sites in the first place and why we/they might want a place in it. This is what the best of postcolonial theory tried to do, but this is also where it predominantly failed to deliver in terms of its class-blindness[22].

Here, Bannerji's insistence on not settling for mere "alternative" or "inclusion"-based interpretive methods is important, as it *problematises the very issue* of "non-representation in spacial/textual politics" in the university space (*UR* 74 sic). She starts to think about the 'the woman question' in a "materialist and historical view of consciousness," within "a theory of a *conscious* and transformative relation between labour, self and society," without which, she believes, "the notion of self or subjectivity remains unconnected to social organization or history in any formative way" (*UR* 91). She begins to understand that the fundamental problem between Marxism and feminism is that the "legitimation [of feminism] on the basis of 'feeling/experience' never comes together with [Marxism's] 'scientific' and objective analysis" (ibid). So in order to validate the "experiencing subject" as the unequivocally central and significant one in feminist theory, Bannerji has to turn to Antonio Gramsci, whose "concept of direct and creative agency is built into the process and content of knowledge" production, where "experience acts as a fulcrum or a hinge from which we can turn both inward and outward" (*UR* 97). On this path, she fortunately finds a mentor in Dorothy E Smith at OISE and embarks on the political project of understanding subjectivity and theorising identity as something actively negotiated, contested and fashioned at each stage of our being. For Smith, experience "is theorized less in terms of *what experience is*, but more methodologically used for *what it does* in organizing a social inquiry" (*UR* 97 emphasis in original). For Bannerji:

> Entitled "social organization of knowledge," Smith's method provides us with a critique of the discourse of Cartesian rationalism and the mental and manual division of labour as social (institutional) and conceptual practices of power. Disclosing the bourgeois ideological and patriarchal standpoint, Smith establishes the validity of beginning from the local and the immediate — namely, our experience — in order to explore the larger social organization. (*UR* 98).

Once she has found this way of working with the political economy of woman in socially agentic and historically contingent terms, Bannerji continues with it in her first monograph, *Thinking Through: Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism* (1995) and expands upon it in *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (referred to as *DS* hereafter, 2000). Channeling Smith, her constant theoretical companion and guru since then, Bannerji offers a "mirror to our everyday world" in each of her sites of learning and unlearning, through a "*critique or a reflection*" of her experiences (emphasis mine), which for her, (as for Joan Scott), is "not the end point, but the beginning of an exploration of the relationship between the personal and the social and therefore the political" (*UR* 67). In fact, this is the red thread running through her subsequent work on the resolution of the woman question within national and subaltern studies and the production of the Bengali gentlewoman in colonial India, a socio-historically invented class-position to which she traces her own origins. Like Spivak, Bannerji excavates the history of her own departure from a postnational world and arrival into a multicultural, white-settler nation, in advanced-capital and class-formation terms. But in doing so, she also offers "an implicit — and often explicit — critique of post-structural and post-colonial approaches to Third World nationalism, most of which tend to erase all forms of social inequality except for an overarching divide" and prioritise instead a binary, simplistic and "basic cultural opposition between Self and Other, colonizer and colonized" (*Of Property and Propriety*, referred to as *P&P* hereafter, 3, 5).

Bannerji reads this fundamental postcolonial paradigm (Vivek Dhareshwar would call it the "predicament" and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks and Fawzia Afzal-Khan "the pre-occupation" of postcolonial studies) to be an opposition premised on "purely linguistic" or "rhetorical and symbolic analyses" and argues instead for a return to basic "political and economic questions" (*P&P* 7). In order to do so, she urges us to move beyond the "conceptual economy" of a Foucauldian power/knowledge network and representational axis and instead engage with knowledge itself as "a form of social relation" (*Inventing Subjects: Studies in Hegemony, Patriarchy and Colonialism*, referred to as *IS* hereafter, 23)[23]. Bannerji's argument is that power is negotiated at every instance of its citation and enunciation, and that subjects are not mere dolls in the making. Instead they actively, agentially, vitally, dialectically, engage with ideology and hegemony in the contradictory and compelling process of inventing their own identities and subjectivities. Jasodhara Bagchi is thus right that Bannerji's incisive "critique of colonial class subjectivity" is "not [just] the product of a 'postcolonial' perspective derived from a reified form institutionalized in North America," but situated in her "lived experience" in both the 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' worlds (*IS* xi, xii). I think what Bagchi is implying is that Bannerji's work does not flower only in the hothouse or greenhouse atmosphere of the prolific postcolonial industry in Anglo-North America, but is rooted in the intimate transactions between differential nodes of power *and pleasure* in the variously called third, underdeveloped or ex-colonised world. Unlike the card-carrying, slogan-bearing postcolonialists that she critiques, Bannerji refuses to see that world *there* to be over-determined or defined solely by the puppet-strings of imperial and neo-/colonial relations. She underscores that in order to understand the significance of postcolonial bodies *here*, we need to have an extended knowledge of how class and social relations worked *there* that enabled their journey from the margin to the centre. "This not only helps at the level of culture, but also what we call the social, that is, our lived reality, to politicize the environment" (*RG* 147). We cannot lose sight of the fact that the sphere *there* has a life-world and power-logic of its own, just as the one *here* does, and that "images of ascription and prescription" in both places *can* be transformed by "accounts which we might call images of resistance" (ibid).

A Politics of the Possible: with thanks to Kumkum Sangari

> We can go on about this endless "now" of colonial, imperialist history, about violence and identity, the makers of difference and identification tags they create.... How would I get out of the dead end of a violent "now," if I did not know what was possible? (*TT* 23, 10)

This section of my chapter explores the issue of the 'possible politics' of subjectivity in which identities are not frozen or cemented in ideology merely, but engage in a relationship of give-and-take whereby they have room to move and maneuver. So far, I have followed Bannerji in her examination of the split between the public and the private aspects of the diasporic self in the context of the nation-state in which such bodies are constituted as other, alien and strange. This is the path through which such bodies 'gain' an activist, politicised self through identification with others in the same boat. There remains the still hidden, opaque life of the diaspora, where the pleasures of the gunny sack and the book of secrets[24] of language, literature, history, memory and community, can be partaken of only by those who are familiar with it, or by those who have borne its weight. This is the 'loss' of the untranslatable self, the self that seems to emerge in enclaves and enclosures where it can flourish, however quietly, vociferously or contentiously, and at least survive in some kind of a ghetto version. The split between these two, the gained and the lost selves, is delineated in much feminist literature on difference and diversity as racial, cultural or ethnic. But that did not seem to me at the root of the profound sense of alienation I experienced in 'alike' feminist communities nor did it explain the many incommensurabilities between me and those whom I *hoped* to or was *expected* to resemble, be able to talk to, or share a perspective with, in racialised political spaces. In fact, even the supposed shared politics we had in common was splintered by the criss-crossing lines of different histories, of which we were individually and collectively ignorant, ill-informed and unknowing. Trinh T Minh-ha's lecture title[25], "Not You/Like You" takes on particular meaning for me here in terms of becoming aware of the "inappropriate other within every I" (*Making* 375). If I may take forward this reasoning, there was an unassimilable 'other' in the very 'I' or 'we' of the collectivity that united us, women of colour.

In this politics of solidarity, even those of us who find ourselves similarly disaggregated and alienated from mainstream power dynamics and culture do not have enough in common by way of world views or ways of living vital, pleasurable lives. Instead, a politicisation of *ressentiment* and reaction seems to be the necessary binding agent in this confection of identity politics — here I am *not* speaking out against identity-politics at all. Instead, I am signalling Rebecca Stringer who argues that the politics of *ressentiment* are a critical constituent in the forging of oppositional politics. Stringer puts the Nietzschean concept of *ressentiment* to work in the service of "reflection upon the dynamics of radical political struggle for social change" (1, reproduced with the permission of the author). She calls into question how the three main assumptions about *ressentiment*, "employed diagnostically to describe aspects of feminism, anarchism, socialism and identity politics" have been predicated upon 1) a reading of the literature of *ressentiment* to be 'unambiguously bad', 2) an ordaining of it as a 'non-transformative' politics, and 3) an assumption of it as something to which the politics of the oppressed are 'prone' (2). Stringer makes a strong, persuasive case for a reconsideration of *ressentiment* as "the affective venue in which the factually powerless *craft* positive political capacity as well as the ability to articulate, problematise, and attempt to ameliorate their experience of, and vulnerability to, 'victimisation'" (3). In her reading, *ressentiment* moves from a static psycho-political state which exhibits a particularised, unchanging and self-subversive set of *a priori* symptoms to a dynamic dialogical process interpellated by, and with the capacity to transform, the power relations from which it springs (4). This polemical tool of political revolt resonates with its sister in arms: activist anger. Sara Ahmed believes that the anger of the "killjoy feminist" is the key element in mobilising against racist patriarchal injustice. About anger, Ahmed professes to have learnt the most from Audre Lorde, and unambiguously offers it as a vehicle for effecting and instigating socio-political transformation[26].

Having said this, and acknowledging that rage, reaction and *ressentiment* have been the necessary flagstones in my path across the murky pond and new-found pool of racisalisation, I want to rehearse, and remind ourselves of, Chela Sandoval, who asked in her report on the third annual U.S. National Women's Studies Association Conference at Storrs in 1981 : "Is there a unified racism outside of most of our experiences which we can identify and courageously confront?" (*Making*55). Tellingly published in the section titled "Still Trembles Our Rage in the Face of Racism" in Anzaldúa's *Making Face Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, this report notes "the poverty of our understanding" about structured "social separations... from separate locations throughout the world" and warns against any "simple unity of feminists of color... forged at the cost of nurturing a world of 'enemies'" (*Making* 58, 57, 65). Sandoval recognizes that anger, as a way of projecting our sense of unbelonging and unease unto the world, springs from many different material and psychic sources and thus produces us in particular but *different* ways. So she demands a "theoretical model that identifies the boundaries within which human subjectivity is constituted... [and also] has the capability of allowing connections to be forged across race, culture, and gender differences" so as to not "limit the kinds of political responses available to us for creating change" (*Making* 63, 65). Bannerji too points out that the "vivid sense we have of being outsider-insiders" is applicable to both where we come from and where, "taking ourselves by the hand we turn corners, always to become and to be" (*TT* 186). Again, I find myself working in this dialectic between a necessary, political anger, and an impulse to explore *all* the possible resources and reasons, the known and explicit and the unknown and embedded, for this anger.

On the road in racist-capitalist settler nations (remember this is a *bildungsroman*), how does one turn a corner then? How does one forge a meaningful and psychically acceptable, politically possible resolution out of this dialectic? How does one argue for a politics of internal critique as necessary to an external, social one without being co-opted by a capitalist, conservative agenda on the one hand, and being excommunicated from one's own sense of belonging to a social group on the other? Postcolonial studies on the one hand and oppositional theories by black women and women of colour seemed to offer some directions, but soon, in prostrating myself at the altar of anti-racist, anti-colonial feminist research, I found myself echoing Bannerji that "my own work, the fruits of my labour, are alienated from me" (*TT* 103). Now this is not simply the absorbed, self-referential alienation of every other graduate student in the contemporary corporate university; this alienation had deep connections to the way my everyday life was circumscribed by the very fabric of Canadian multicultural life. In making sure that my Indian passport was kept updated at every moment, that I did not forget to renew my 'visitor's visa' every time I left Canada for a conference and wanted to regain entry, in living in the most frugal ways so as to pay the 100% differential fees mandated by the university for international students and finally, in wading through reams and reams of paper in the process of applying for a 'permanent resident' status (which entailed an endless round of 'recent' photographs, medical exams, police checks, testimonials of character and 'in good standing' from numerous faculty members at my department), I would forget(!) that I had another being, another existence, another *astitva*. In maintaining this meticulous paper trail and shoring up evidence of my existence as a legitimate and proper candidate for life in Canada, I would sometimes obscure my other beings, my multiple past and present existences, my intangible, familiar actualities that seem to be 'lost' in the maze of migration. At the other end of that paper trail, lay the shining aura of a 'visible minority' (or what Sandoval similarly identifies as "the classifications recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau... 'Native American,' 'Black,' 'Asian,' 'Hispanic,'" *Making* 62), none of which had anything to with my sense of being and belonging in the world.

In this journey of loss and gain, my old training in postcolonial literatures ran amok with my new education in feminisms of colour. While I could find many parallels between my own convent-and-public school English education in India and theirs, indeed laugh together over the ubiquity of 'our' classical English literature canon and the corporal punishment meted out by Catholic nuns and lay teachers alike, I found that I had not much in common with the woman of colour who hailed from Trinidad or Haiti in terms of a racial or linguistic sensibility nor the twice-migrant, monolingual 'Indian' diasporic whose painful journey of racialisation in Britain had been consolidated in Canada. In fact, my closest intimates and interlocutors were from places that had an ethic of multi-lingualism, porous (but definitely class-inflected) channels of social intercourse, non-alignment postnational, anti-colonial politics and deep affiliations with world literature of all shades, colours and hues. In this context, is a simple solidarity or similarity of experience enough? This was confusing, for the platform of feminisms of colour raised more questions about oppositional activism than answering them. Bannerji's work again, for me, was the first to articulate a direct link between state-formation in Canada and its women-of-colour politics, as also the classed nature of my own gendered relations within my civil society, and those of others like me, in my nation of origin in the subcontinent. She is the only critic who makes the bridge between that life and this possible, and makes explicit the contradictions and commonalities between those politics and these. This bridge, however, is not constructed on the back of colour[27].

Bannerji's most sustained critique of women-of-colour politics emerges between 1995 and 2000, at a time marked by profound political crises, both in India and Canada, in fact the world over, in the shape of resurgent cultural nationalisms, religious fundamentalisms and ethnic traditionalisms. Where earlier she had celebrated the politics of identity as a necessary ideological tool to make the connections between history and social relations visible (*TT* 38), she now recognises the real threat of fascism that inverts and corrupts the revolutionary meaning of identity, in the "attempt to reify history and aestheticize politics in the language of authenticity and culture" (*DS* 1). Around this time, she publishes two collections of essays, one of which has had much currency in Canada in anti-racist feminist politics, in fact has become the byword of the raced critique of official multiculturalism. This is *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. However, the other, published just a year later in 2001, *Inventing Subjects: Studies in Hegemony, Patriarchy and Colonialisms*, which in my opinion, forms the companion volume to *DS*, has not had that much circulation in Canada. The easily given reason is that *IS* concentrates on social subject formation in India, more specifically, the construction of the Bengali gentlewoman or *bhadramahila*, to mediate the imagining of 'India' in colonial as well as national discourse. Thus it cannot be expected to have the same relevance or reception here in contemporary multicultural Canada. This hailing[28] of Bannerji as exemplar theorist-of-colour without taking her work on India as essential to her class-critique of gender is an oversimplification and an oversight. In fact, *DS* and *IS* have to be read together if we are to make meaningful, potent connections between "historical and everyday life and experiences of people and their various forms of consciousness" (*DS* 11).

My interest in *DS* is thus not separate from my current analysis of South Asian postcolonial feminisms, but helps me to critically examine feminist subject formation in Anglo-North American academe through the lens of agency, something that I began doing in my exploration of 'third world women' vis-à-vis immigration policies and racialistion in the previous chapter. This is the unfinished and class-conscious project of postcolonial studies that the editors of and contributors to *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* (2002) enjoin upon us, following a "Rethinking Marxism" conference in Amherst. A Gramscian/Marxian framework of class-consciousness and *historicisation* is important for my reading of professional academic subjecthood and subjectivity in the age of advanced capital, but being inadequately schooled in readings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, I find Bannerji's filterings especially useful. Also, the cultural studies approach via Stuart Hall (via Antonio Gramsci) to the production of 'consent' as opposed to 'coercion' in decoding the grand narratives of colonialism and capitalism are very important to my understanding of invented social categories and subject formation. Let me take up the formation of the Bengali middle-class woman before I talk about how she becomes a woman of colour in Anglo-North America. But I want to proceed with the necessary, and cannot-be-emphasised-enough *caution* that even as Bannerji's class analysis offers a template for other such presumed bodies of colour from South Asia, the case-study of the Bengali *bhadramahila* should be taken as a time-and-place specific invention only. The task of postcolonial studies remains to uncover more such alert and active narratives so as to understand the full story of subjectivities from the colonial and the postnational worlds. We may happily discover that no generalisations whatsoever are possible.

Incantations of Subjectivity:

> The notion of inventing subjects, read in a nuanced way, contains a double meaning. *It speaks to social subjectivity as being both inventing and invented.* Through this formulation social subjects can be considered as cultural and ideological objects of other's invention while pointing to the possibility of inventing themselves as subjects within a given socio-historical context. This recognition confers upon them ideological and political agencies in which they can be considered and functioning both as existing social subjects and ideological topics. (*IS* 3)

I find this formulation very useful as I attempt to understand the curious interpellation of migrant subjects like me by the identity category 'woman of colour' even as I interrogate its suitability for subjects who have been socialised and politicised in other geo-political spheres[29]. When marked, migrant women in Anglo-North America are put under the microscope as having 'colour,' one of the modes of negotiating with this fixing, labeling and discriminating category is to claim it as our own and speak from it to give voice to relations of power and the ways in which we are implicated in it. This is what Stringer would classify as the politics of *ressentiment*. Such a revisionary and recuperative use of what is essentially a totalising term does not only offer liberatory, oppositional possibilities, but also the potential to invert the gaze of the 'seer' to examine the conditions of *her* own production. In other words, the use of a problematic category like 'woman of colour' may provide the subjects constituted by it the great opportunity to undertake an examination of power that is necessary and useful to the larger dominant notion of 'woman' and 'colour' itself, and the socio-political and historical terms that dictate it. And in the case of self-reflexive theorists like Bannerji and Spivak, this has also meant a frank exploration of the situations that pre-date and out-manouver the making of the coloured, gendered, classed subject in her own milieu and place[30].

Inventing Subjects includes six previously published essays written between 1989 and 1995, that are theoretically connected in their elaboration of the contemporary "field of feminist historical sociology" with respect to, but not limited to India, as they engage in the project of "building a feminist and anti-racist or anti-colonial Marxist historical sociology" (*IS* 2). The subtitle of the collection, *Studies in Hegemony*, *Patriarchy and Colonialism*, reveals Bannerji's continuing interest in class, gender and colonialism in conceptualising the subject *in* society and "social subjectivity as being *both inventing and invented*" (*IS* 3 emphasis mine). The essays are influenced by E P Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1966), Leonora Davidoff and Catharine Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1950* (1987) and Joan Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988). Each of these scholarly treatises models for Bannerji an examination of hegemony "for both dominant and oppressed classes" and makes clear that ideology "cannot be comprehended without its visceral connection with historical social relations and moral codes of power which texture the everyday life of any civil society and culture" (*IS* 16, 13). This is a critical formulation for understanding how feminisms of colour in Anglo-North-American academe *cannot only* be understood as theoretical dilemmas or scholarly objects for racialised subjects, but instead have to be intimately interleaved with how the 'lives' of these bodies are mediated in worldly knowledge and social experience. If our lives are not lived in ghettos of colour, then the politics of anti-racism cannot be undertaken solely by communities of colour either. The struggle against racialised and classed oppression necessarily needs to be borne by *all* members of our society as equal and co-participants. Bannerji clarifies that no identity constituency, however hegemonically or ideologically produced, lives in hermetically enclosed intellectual spaces and that racialised bodies spend and expend their everyday lives in diverse, varied and multiple relations of meaning *in society*. Thus, those have to be taken into consideration in order to arrive at any sustained understanding of identity. Here I want to add my own stipulation that however problematic or oppressive certain identity positions may be, the same individual who occupies these labels may also have access to other identity positions that afford participation, pleasure and power in broader networks of sociality.

This is not the place to take up all of Bannerji's chapters in *IS* for discussion: each of them would merit an entire chapter of its own, as she sketches out and fills in with scholarly detail, a fascinating narrative of the writing of India as a *doing* of ideology in William Jones' construction and James Mills' historiography, the tension between hegemony and ideology in British reform legislation through the Age of Consent Act in 1891[31], the discourse on shame (*lajja*), the clothing of gentlewomen (*bhadramahila*), the fashioning of a self through educational proposals *for and by* women in popular magazines in colonial Bengal, and the discussion of daughters and mothers in Bengal's literary spaces. These essays offer a dense social, historical and sociological analysis of what it meant to be a certain kind of class-caste privileged woman in colonial Bengal and what that legacy has meant for her moral-intellectual descendants (like me). In all this, what I would like to highlight, and what I find particularly conducive to my own analysis of South Asian postcolonial academics vis-à-vis scholarship of colour, is Bannerji's bringing together of ideology and hegemony. Her deep "quest to understand the social rather than accepting an ascribed economistic interpretation of Karl Marx's views of class struggle and the making of history, of the active roles he assigns to social subjects" relies on her interpretation of Antonio Gramsci's "notion of common sense" in order to overcome "a binary and inverse relationship between 'class' and 'culture', or 'discourse' and 'social relations', structure and forms of consciousness" (*IS* 9). She conceives of the social subject as produced equally by the dominant "moral constellations" of "civilizational judgment and representational construction" as well as being "designers... of their own invention" (*IS* 4, 5).

IS explains that the production of a gentlewoman/*bhadramahila* by the patriarchal, nationalist, middle class in colonial Bengal through idealised rules of moral conduct, innovations in dress-codes and popular magazine culture, was an educational and modernising undertaking that was both "non-apparent as such as well as a matter of conscious political and ideological project" (*IS* 8). To elaborate, and give just one example:

> Here the project of creating an ideal genteel feminine identity is one of creating a difference, of creating a sartorial- moral appearance or form which will be distinct from the type of ideal identity for Bengali/Indian women projected either by colonial discourse or by an unreconstituted traditional/feudal one. The woman here... is an upper-class/caste woman with more than a physical function. Thus she is not just a tropical body, a combination of animal sex and fecundity, but rather the object-subject of a moral constellation which signifies transcendence. It is her chaste sexual morality, the minimization of her physicality, her 'decency,' that is the goal of the sartorial projects. These sartorial signs of the *bhadramahila*, then, throw up a challenge to colonial discourse even when picking up both moral and visual elements from it. (*IS* 4-5)

This is the 'typical' history from which the migrant female postcolonial South Asian scholar descends. While the details and specificities will be different in each case, the overwhelming mediation of a nationalist, class and caste heritage, and engagement with these ideas of being in the world, influences the subject formation of the educated modern woman from the subcontinent who comes to the New World to expand upon her history of consciousness, social, psychological and intellectual. This is similar to the production of the white woman and white femininity in the context of imperial travel as explored by Mary Louis Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: travel writing and transculturation* (1993), Kumari Jayawardena in *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Colonial Rule* (1995) and Inderpal Grewal's *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (1996). We then have to remember and juxtapose this travelling woman against Kurtz's betrothed in her shining aura, "draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch," who stayed behind, waiting at home as the moral regulant, for England's 'men' who went forth on adventures for their country's glory, carrying the white man's burden (from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* 54).

Bannerji offers an analysis of this idealised Bengali gentlewoman in a co-edited masterful collection of essays, *Of Property and Propriety: The Role of Gender and Class in Imperialism and Nationalism*, published in the same year as *Invented Subjects* (2001), titled "Pygmalion Nation: Towards a Critique of Subaltern Studies and the 'Resolution of the Women's Question.'" She writes this essay in the dismaying wake of the contemporary dismantlings and disintegrations of "liberal democracies of the Third World" and uses the opportunity to read the modern nation in terms of "a critique of private property, of capital and class" (*P&P* 35). She takes up the Subaltern Studies group, especially the work of Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty, and their "resolution of the women's question" as a crystallisation of "a construct of feminine morality resulting in a hindu brahmanical and upper-caste patriarchy" (*P&P* 40). In making the caste Bengali worldview stand in for the 'Indian' nation, a masculinist Subaltern Studies group, in Bannerji's reading, is guilty of theoretically engineering a "separation between class and culture, history and social organization, leading to a cultural overdetermination [that] amounts to dehistoricization or a mythicization of history" (*P&P* 36). Bannerji acknowledges her debt to Marxist Indian scholars like Uma Chakravarti, Sudesh Vaid, Kumkum Sangari, Sumit and Tanika Sarkar, whose work has not circulated that widely in the hegemonic Anglo-North American academy. Like them, she is impatient with "the current erasure of social relations in post-colonial studies," especially in its treatment of colonial discourses or "literary representations of Asia" and for ignoring "internal forms of class and gender stratification inside colonized societies" (*P&P* 10, 5, 12). I do think she gets carried away with this analysis, and her peeve is much more fruitfully directed at the Subaltern School members than postcolonial studies at large, whose conscientious feminist scholars have undertaken precisely the kind of work she argues for in her essay.

Bannerji starts with the metalepsis that Europe as well as Asia in the post-feudal, pre-colonial era were pervaded by "*similar* social forms of gender, class, and status stratification systems" which only "later parted company with the development of capitalism in Western Europe" (*P&P* 13). By treating Eurasia as a solid block for analysis, Bannerji is able to show how with the development of a colonial, capitalist economy and of the imagined community called nation, "women's rights to property" had to be "mediated by conscious and unconscious norms and practices of respectability and familial propriety" (*P&P* 14). She goes on to show that at various points in history, "colonial administrators and nationalists debated various gender norms and familial practices" wherein "competing claims to cultural and moral superiority, differences between Asia and Europe were highlighted, while their similarities in matters of inheritance, marriage, divorce, and property were obscured" (*P&P* 15)[32]. Because "nationalism was related to commodified notions of territory through its claims to state power," women began to be shaped as "native and other" *within* their own territorial jurisdictions in order to relegate them to the non-citizenal status of domesticity and privacy (*P&P* 19). This is the way in which the Subaltern School has imagined "women, the peasantry, and the working class... as 'the other' of 'the other,' as fragments of the post-colonial nation" (*P&P* 9). It is clear that Bannerji does not buy this ruse of "promulgating two water-tight phases, the pre-colonial and the colonial" to set up the "two opposing columns [of a suspect kind of postcolonialism] marking the community in opposition to the individual, home to the world, and tradition to modernity" (*P&P* 51). She refuses the patriarchal assumptions of both the colonial and the national "as they convert women... into ideological signs of hegemony" (*P&P* 55).

This very exciting way of reading women as implicated in the fight for property and propriety, status and territory (in social, political, legal, psychical and epistemological senses) can be clearly inscribed onto their postnational, diasporic condition, where the assumed 'other' of the postcolonial nation has taken on the mantle of the presumed 'other' or 'subaltern' in the settler colony. No matter that this 'subaltern' comes from a long line of intellectual elites, produced and constructed through opposing and multiple subjectivities. In fact, we might want to ponder why so many feminist scholars, both of the postcolonial school in the

West and of Marxist sympathy in the ex-colonies, have undertaken this kind of anti-nationalist, anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal stance (we can now remember the useful distinction Bannerji makes between gender-positionality in nationalism versus national-liberation movements)[33]. This is where anti-racist feminism in white-settler colonies may be seen as a critique of the capitalist nation-state. When rights of the deprived, the marginalized and the silenced are conceived of in terms of property, as having a stake in the *commonwealth* that the nation-state is, it becomes clear why the political contestation becomes so charged. This is precisely what Bannerji argues in *DS*, that the traffic in postcolonial women as backward and only worthy of rescue should essentially be seen as part and parcel of Canada's racist/capitalist immigration policies.

In Search of a Language of Belonging:

> But what constitutes my private and my public? What cut off the nerves that connect them, or obscured from the self, my particular self, the elemental constitutive relations between them? Why is remembering so hard, and doing so "natural," so necessary a gesture? *TT* 98.

Even though *DS* was published before *IS* and *P&P*, one has to recognise the history Bannerji attends to in the latter in order to understand her instinctive and visceral repugnance for the category 'woman of colour' as delineated in the essay, "The Paradox of Diversity: The Construction of a Multicultural Canada and 'Women of Colour'" (*DS*). Let me elaborate upon this now and take you through a timeline of the term as drawn up by Bannerji. She rightly reminds us that the terms "women of colour, diversity, difference and multiculturalism… are now so familiar that we are startled when reminded about their relatively recent appearance on the stage of politics and theory" (*DS* 15). She mentions at the outset that "whereas the discourse of multiculturalism with its core concepts of diversity or difference have a general cross-border or transnational appeal, the related agentic expression 'women of colour' is primarily North American" (*DS* 16). She compares this term to the widely used "Black or Asian women" in the British context and also clarifies that "women with African and aboriginal backgrounds do not readily respond to this name" in the North American context (ibid). Bannerji cites Julia Sudbury's work in *Other Kinds of Dreams* which makes clear that non-white women in Britain have called themselves "black" so as to avoid the British government's "divisive naming" techniques and that this is not a "correlate of being African in this usage" (*DS* 21). She further clarifies that black British culturalism "generally came out of an antiracist and anti-empire struggle mounted from a class perspective" (22)[34]. This of course has to do with the overdetermination of class hierarchy in the U.K. If caste is seen as the predominant method of social stratification in India and race in the U.S., it is not unreasonable to understand how black class activism in the U.K. has encompassed "intergroup politics, for example between African, Caribbean, Indian and Bangladeshi women, as well as politics between them, the white woman's movement and the state" (ibid). Bannerji contrasts black British coalitional politics with feminist work of colour, used interchangeably with black or third world women in the U.S., "indicating a routine practice" with reference to the two anthologies co-edited by Mohanty, covered in the last chapter (*DS* 23).

But how did this routine practice become so "unselfconscious" in Canada? Bannerji points to anthologies like *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (1991) and *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (1997) as responsible for equating the "common contexts" of "relations of inequality" between U.S. women of colour and third world women in the context of "antiracist feminist organizing" (*DS* 24). She further elaborates upon the work of racialised U.S. feminists like Angela Davis, Paula M L Moya, Patricia Hill Collins and Linda Alcoff in order to sketch the broad background against which she highlights her project of analysing the term "woman of colour" in the Canadian context. Bannerji sees the category as directly resulting from "multiculturalism as a state sanctioned, state organized ideological affair in Canada" (*DS* 27). She notes how in the practices of everyday life, "in actual mundane granting/funding, in electoral polices and outcomes, in ethnic cultural fairs and religious celebrations, in court legal defences," the logic of 'visible minority' making "organizes the socio-cultural, legal-economic space of Canada" (ibid). In the process, the "racial potentials" of U.S. feminisms of colour, according to Bannerji, are "substantially diminished" (ibid). Bannerji clarifies this in an early essay, "Returning the Gaze":

> The category of visible minorities is perplexing. On the surface it seems to be a simple euphemism; it seems to work as a way of classifying or categorizing, without appearing to be in any way racist. It seems to be an attempt at nicety.... To be labelled "visible" is to be told to become invisible, to get lost. It matches the stares — not just of curiosity but of contempt — that we get in public places. This category is the abstraction of that "look" which cuts one out from that necessary anonymity without which no ordinary life can be carried out. (*RG* 149)

Bannerji traces the route by which she started off "puzzled and repelled" by the expression "woman of colour," then was questioned and accused by her peers in India for reverting to "a racist, segregational language of apartheid and the American South — a 'coloured woman,'" and finally how it "traveled to us from below the 49th parallel, and found a congenial home on our tongue" (*DS* 28). The making of home, that pesky, troublesome, contentious task, becomes the theme then that this migrant scholar uses to reconcile her use of a tetchy and unacceptable word in this inhospitable land. We may remind ourselves of how she spoke of not having moved very much closer to her milieu in a half-life lived in Canada. She had started off by using the notion "non-white" for "the purpose of creating an antiracist critique" in a "binary conceptualization and politics" of race (ibid). But by 2000, in spite of finding this "colour hierarchy... an offensive way of creating social subjects and political agents," she begins to use it "every once in a while, for the purpose of intelligibilty, to keep in step with [her] fellow antiracist feminists" (*DS* 29).

In my view, 'black' remains a handy term for organising against its binary of 'white' power. Similarly, 'non-white' is and was a pointed way for situating and contextualising the terms and conditions of the creation of racialised subjectivity in white-settler nations. It allows the possibility for *every* kind of woman to gather against *white privilege* without having to zoom into, and fixate upon, the racialised body as the repository of difference and discrimination. Obviously the simple use of the term 'non-white' has not transformed the entrenched relations of power operating in institutional and social spaces. Non-white is also not a term that can be readily employed by bodies marked and read as white, however *anti-*

whiteness their political proclivities might be. So Bannerji identifies just why, "as the '80s rolled by, woman of colour was Canadianized" and how a "discursive revolution, [a] paradigm shift" allowed woman of colour to become "landed" like Canadian immigrants (*DS* 29).

In Bannerji's sustained and illuminating analysis, the link between immigration and a political culture that allowed the acceptance, use and naturalising of "a colour-based notion of subjectivity and agency" in the Canadian context becomes crystal clear. She points out that the "open door policy of immigration" in the Pierre Trudeau era was connected to the "expectation of capitalist growth in Canada and the aspiration to the creation of a liberal democratic nationhood" (*DS* 30). The points-based method of inducting highly professionalised skilled and unskilled labour into the nation is a move based on class considerations, but the classed method of social stratification is then collapsed by the use of the racist label "visible minority" by Employment Canada. Furthermore, colour as "a term of alterity" for race was "translated into the language of visibility" (*DS* 28, 30). Thus the "new Canadian social and political subject was appellated 'visible minority,' stressing both the features of being non-white and therefore visible in the way whites are not, of being politically minor players" (*DS* 30), and also by virtue of living in "a state of constant facelessness" (*RG* 145). This is the moment when the category previously covered under the umbrella term "immigrant women" was prevailed upon by the National Directorate of Women and the Secretary of State to make a non-white "niche for themselves in the mainstream politics by creating a representational organization, the National Coalition of Visible Minority Women" (*DS* 31). Thus, for Bannerji:

> This popular feminist term actually relied for its political meaning and vitality upon the mainstream analogue and the same discourse of multiculturalism pertaining to visible minority women embedded in both state and society for its existential environment. With *no interest in class politics*, and *no real analysis of or resistance to racialization or ethnicization*, chiefly occupied with *bureaucratic representation* or inclusion for a very limited *power sharing with the status quo*, these political terminologies became current usages. The multi-ethnic, multinational state, with its history of racialized class formation and political ideology, discovering multiculturalism as a way of both hiding and enshrining power relations, provided a naturalized political language even to the others of Canadian society. (*DS* 31 emphasis mine)

But this is not where the unselfconsciousness stopped. Because "visible minority women translated well into women of colour," the latter became the preferred term of choice for alternative politics in Canada by "vaguely and pleasantly" gesturing to "race as colour and, of course, to gender/patriarchy by evoking women" and thus solving "the problem of finding a name for building coalition among all women" (*DS* 31). Bannerji charges that this shift makes race "lose its hard edge and criticality, class disappeared entirely" and the term "unproblematically combined within itself both the common sense of race and the antidote of liberal pluralism" (*DS* 31-32). Furthermore, a "substitution" of 'race' with the language of diversity and difference "culturalizes our politics" and "depoliticizes us" (*DS* 34). It detracts from the "actualities" of non-white women's lives and also foregoes the "gesture towards white privilege" (ibid). Bannerji is not willing to allow this "colour coded self-perception" to be "palatable" and cautions against letting colour become "an associational and connotative path to diverse histories and cultures of the nations of other women" (*DS* 33). Accepting "an identity declared on the semiological basis of one's skin colour" by non-white women is for Bannerji but further evidence of the "desocialized and ahistorical" context in which "political culture and discourse" operates in Canada (*DS* 32, 33). Otherwise, she contends, "such a coinage or neologism would not have been so easily adopted by women who see themselves a practitioners of politics of opposition" (*DS* 33). I could not agree more with her.

In conclusion, Bannerji calls for a more stringent examination of the discourse of diversity and how it masquerades as a "horizontal space" in which all racialised identities get to keep their 'cultures.' The insistence on keeping *difference* forever explicit, visible and marked in white settler nations betrays, after all, the deep, ideological and hegemonic desire for an undifferentiated citizenry that may be governed by its dominant "we." This "we" is "an essentialized version of a colonial European turned into Canadian and the subject of Canadian nationalism" (*DS* 42). This is the context in which Mohanty too revisits her earlier essay, "Under Western Eyes" in the U.S. Bannerji further clarifies:

> ... the identity of the Canadian "we" does not reside in language, religion or other aspects of culture, but rather in the European/North American physical origin — in the body and the colour of skin. Colour of skin is then elevated here beyond its contingent status and becomes an essential quality called whiteness, and this becomes the ideological signifier of a unified non-diversity. (*DS* 42)

This is the occluded context in which the "reified and racialized political agency called woman of color" becomes possible in the first place (*DS* 34).

Bannerji's final words are to confound this "horizontal space" (*DS* 50) of statist relations by refusing its language of colour and forging a different way of doing resistance. For her, such an agential and alert practice rests on "a politicized notion of representation rather the liberal notion of visibility which structures the discursive practices of multiculturalism and ethnic and race relations" (*RG* xv). She demonstrates how to do this in her illustration of Bengali women's representation in India and by questioning the Charles Taylorean "politics of recognition" in Canadian multicultural policy. This bi-partite gesture of examining both the inner and the outer worlds of her subjectivity is a nuanced and critical method for understanding identity politics.

Now I turn to Sherene H Razack, another migrant scholar, who takes up her anti-racist feminist politics against the multicultural nation state around the same time as Bannerji. She situates her academic work within the larger context of community teaching and legal research. Her critique is directed at continuing modes of colonisation of aboriginal, first nations and racialised peoples in Canadian courtrooms and classrooms, as well as what she calls the "new imperialism" of international peace-keeping and humanitarian discourses of the first world. Having made the transition from a working class background into an academic professional class, Razack is interested most of all in the how we are complicit in webs of power and its regimes of surveillance. She makes the transition from anti-racist to transnational feminism with 'accountability' as her credo, while trying to row, unsteadily, the two boats of Caribbean and Canadian belonging. The next section looks at how she engages with this double consciousness as well as double bind in two different regimes of looking.

Sherene H Razack: speaking across alliance and accountability:

> People used to justify Caribbean naturalistic writing in somewhat predictable ways: that we hadn't suffered debilitating wars on the road to independence (or after); no mass starvation; no recent genocide; no official 'disappearances' on a grand scale. Censorship, yes, but not total or efficient enough to drive writing into symbolism, into allegory. Of course, one answer to that would be to cite the experience of racism and the aesthetic of pigmentocracy; of children suffering neglect and women violence, etc., all of which might be intractable enough to change the shape of the well-made story. As would the surreal experience of perceiving yourself living on the periphery, or *abroad*; or of having to think of home as something possibly mobile, of being victims of what Andrew Salkey memorably calls, in a poem, 'a sea-split marriage.' We don't have to experience all of these things — none of us alive has experience slavery, after all — all you need is to have an imaginative engagement with it. (emphasis in the original, underscoring mine)
>
> E A Markham. *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Short Stories*. xxviii

I start with the above quote from E A Markham's eloquent and evocative introduction to *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Short Stories* in order to place in context the backdrop against which I am reading Razack's work. Five things are important for me here: 1) the deterministic hierarchy of colonial pigmentocracy in the Caribbean, 2) the necessity of a continuing and crushing engagement with racism, 3) the idea of the mobile, shifting home, 4) the surreal sense of 'no' home or of always being *un*-placed, and 5) the importance of direct story-telling to address the above four points.

I started reading Sherene Razack's work on anti-racism at a time when I was introduced to the regime of visibility in Canada. Her *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms* (referred to as *LWP* hereafter), published in the same year that I came to Canada as an international student (1998), shattered the "well-shaped story " of Canadian benevolence in the area of human rights, especially with regards to its immigration and refugee record. She argued that the fabric of the much-vaunted Canadian quilt, where each tiny little patch was supposedly individual and unique (contributing to the vibrancy of the Canadian mosaic, as opposed to the assimilationist American salad-bowl model), was in fact interwoven with the myth of white supremacy. Especially in the courtrooms and classrooms of the nation where crucial narratives of knowledge were created, upheld and perpetuated, a violent gaze was instantiated at the moment when white man and black man, in Frantz Fanon's terms, made "eye contact" (*LWP* 4). She was particularly interested in how the dominant community of the North saw *women* from Third World countries through its "otherizing and inferiorizing" lenses, through publicised stories of the veil, the female genital mutilation debate and examples of Third World men's brutality towards their women (*LWP* 7). Razack read into these various "psychically structured and sexualized" narratives a repetition of the classic colonial encounter, where "both the colonizer whose eyes commit the act of violence, and the colonized who is erased by the colonial gaze" are equally "depersonalized" (*LWP* 4). At the heart of her exploration was the attempt to "explain colonial alienation" as well as the "delirium, desire, and neurosis" implicit in this dead-lock of gazes (Fanon qtd. *LWP* 4).

Razack's book was "concerned with identifying the conditions for the production of a new kind of subject," namely the modern racialised and gendered being, the newly created woman of colour *in* the North, who was subject to an especially brutal regime of looking by the Canadian state that would decide in its courtrooms and classrooms whether or not she was fit material to be part of its liberal, emancipated citizenry (*LWP* 4-5). Moreover, while Razack wanted to "critically examine the extent to which colonizers and the colonized are highly structured and overdetermined by racism," she also ambitiously promised "a gendered version of Fanon's goal — the liberation of the woman of colour from herself, her release from the gaze and its consequences" (*LWP* 5). As manifestos go, this was a very powerful one for me, and I started following the stories Razack was telling as a way to figure out how *I* got into the trap of the gaze and how I too could escape the minotaur of racism. It is only gradually that I have understood the very different places from which Razack and Bannerji (or I) have encountered this gaze, and also the different routes we have taken to address it. I have understood that where we begin our journeys makes a difference in how we negotiate the road taken, something Razack comes to realise too, in her work on transnational feminism and its limitations. The Markham quote provides a hint of the *continuity* between the racist, colonial structures a subject like Razack encounters in her old home in the Caribbean and in the new one in Canada. What is most enabling for me is the promise of the 'release from the self' that Razack offers, a project not unlike the 'unlearning of one's privilege' that Spivak insists is essential for the project of decolonisation. This is a precarious journey in itself, one worth undertaking, however destabilised by the gaze from the outside.

Since then, Razack has consistently been involved in questions of locationality and "how globalization scripts us, women of colour, in highly specific ways, regulating our bodies differently in the North than in the South" (*Anti-racism feminism: Critical race and gender studies*, referred to as *ARF* hereafter, 39). In the Canadian context, the beloved fantasy of "the imperialist as [the] saviour of Third World peoples is an important construct in nation building" (*LWP* 89). But, given that story-telling is, and can be, used by both sides, it becomes imperative to "pay attention to the interpretive structures that underpin how we hear and how we take up the stories of oppressed groups" (*LWP* 37). Razack argues that even as "powerful narratives turn oppressed peoples into objects, to be held in contempt, or to be saved from their fates by more civilized beings," the "gaze from the other side" and "an opposition to established knowledge" can offer powerful tools for social change (*LWP* 3, 36). Here, an attention to site-specific struggles leads Razack to ask questions about "the role of Indo-Caribbean scholars in the diaspora" and how they can, and should, "avoid becoming native informants, or even First World ethnographers who objectify [their] own communities in a bid for academic respectability" (*Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women*, referred to hereafter as *Matikor*, 155). Such (ab)uses of native informancy in the interests of "looking" and "policing the borders of nation, race, and gender" go hand in hand with the construction of the Canadian nation's reputation as a human rights haven and humanitarian refuge for asylum seekers. For Razack, these issues and sites become the recurring analytic frames through which she views her own complicated position as an anti-racist transnational feminist.

In the Courtroom: Rogue Cultures and Benevolent Nations:

> In refugee discourse, as in all racialized knowledge, the Other is not a subject onto itself. The West knows refugees only in terms of how they may be contained, policed and regulated.... I suggest that imperial frames that reproduce the binary of the civilized west/the uncivilized east characterize much feminist and legal discourse about gender persecution.... the successful claimant must be cast as a cultural other.... it is through various orientalist and imperialist frames that women's gender-based persecution becomes visible in the West. (*CJWL* 50)

In March 1993, "Canada became the first country in the world to issue guidelines to the Immigration Act that would enable women fleeing domestic violence to claim asylum" (*Matikor* 156). These guidelines created categories under which women from certain *types* of *backward and barbaric* countries could seek refugee status under the mantle of "gender persecution" (*Canadian Journal of Women and the Law,* referred to as *CJWL* hereafter, 45). Razack gives us two examples of such legal categories or arbitrary "social groups": "Trinidadian-women-subject-to-abuse" and "dependent female members of an abusive father's family" (*CJWL*67, 72). While these guidelines opened the doors to refugee claims in the name of feminist reform, they confirmed "both female incapacity and Third World dysfunction" and necessitated that the claimant "make the link between the violence she suffers and her cultural incapacities or those of her state" (*CJWL* 72, 77). They thus created conditions whereby "women's claims for asylum were most likely to succeed when they are presented as victims of dysfunctional and exceptionally patriarchal cultures and states" (*CJWL* 46), i.e. as *different* from and *inferior* to enlightened Northern/Western nations/cultures that believe in and enforce the rule of law. In the article, "Domestic Violence as Gender Persecution: Policing the Borders of Nation, Race, and Gender," Razack offers a case-by-case analysis of some of the claimants in the early 1990s and explains how the production and construction of this kind of 'woman' in the media and the national imaginary of Canada is predicated upon the setting up of a hierarchy "not only between expert and survivor" [on/of abuse] but also upon how "her story must function to establish her as a pitiable victim from the South who must be rescued by her compassionate Northern saviors" and in which her "emotional disclosure" must play a determining role (*Matikor* 162).

Razack makes it clear that "in the First World, the refugee hearing is a profoundly racialised event" in which claimants are not allowed to "have histories that are inextricably intertwined with those of the West" and thus "the cycle of imperialism continues uninterrupted" (*CJWL* 46, 50, 72). These case-studies and the way they are dealt with in media and theory lead Razack to the conclusion that "the subject" of the "burgeoning legal scholarship on gender persecution" (and "Western feminist theory") is the "culturally othered woman" (*CJWL* 45). Creating a picture of these "women... caught in the barbaric hold of their cultures and religions," the *Toronto Star* in April 1993 ran a month-long series on "The Third World Woman" replete with "large photographs of veiled women and poor South Asian women and girls shown reaching out for handouts" (*CJWL* 55, 58). Although "it was mentioned that 'poverty is the great oppressor,' the real culprits... were clearly Third World men" (*CJWL* 58). In this grid, there was no distinction between Grenadian, Guyanese, Iranian, Kenyan, Saudi-

Arabian, Somalian, Trinidadian and Yemeni women. All were similarly perceived to be "doomed to a life of misery" as "phantoms of the census forms" (ibid). Attention to class positions was entirely absent. And yet, when it came to the actual space of the refugee hearing, it was clear that major ideological distinctions were being made in order to grant asylum or not to these women.

The real-life impact of stories offered in everyday, common-sense journalism, coloured heavily by the idea of a charitable Christian faith and sensibility with its underlying agenda of the white man's burden, coupled with an emancipatory (Calvinistic) capitalism, is to create 'refugees' out of *every* person who is racialised into an existence of colour. In Razack's analysis, no act by a 'person of colour' is seen as independent from a cry for help against the original, oppressive cultures from which these bodies emerge. If on the one hand, Razack demands accountability for the ways in which the West is implicated in "the contemporary patterns of global economic exploitation and the political contexts that produce the world's refugees" (*CJWL* 48), on the other, we also have to be attentive to the fact that the national imaginary of a racist white settler colony is incapable of freeing itself of the trope of pity and rescue that marks and characterises any and all bodies that do not fall within its insider circle of identifiable modes of 'free' existence. In other words, anything that is different from how the nation-state imagines to be its foundational (Christian) myth has to be rendered strange, heathen and in need of true emancipation. This is surely why century after century, decade after decade, the West imagines itself to be the harbinger of 'democracy' and 'freedom' to poor benighted nations of the East. In this project, an unthinking hegemonic or common sense feminism is not an innocent bystander but actively supports its brethren to spread the good word. For example, Razack cites the case of Dularie Boodlal which became "a cause célèbre on the national news media" leading to "hundreds of faxes from individuals and women's groups" urging Canada to admit this woman "under humanitarian and compassionate grounds" (*CJWL* 58). As has been shown in the work on female genital mutilation, the veil, the dowry system, female infanticide, and scores of other 'third world women's problems,' an uncritical analysis that does not take into consideration *all* the social relations that go into the erection and maintenance of these forms of oppression can only rely on that final refuge of ethnographic feminism: to rescue brown women from brown men and thereby fit them into imperial tropes that demonstrate their utter incapacity as women and as cultures.

At the site of the refugee hearing, where such tropes exhibit the full-blown symptoms of a larger power-knowledge malaise, Razack shows that Indo-Trinidadian women, who were among "some of the first women to claim asylum" (*Matikor* 155) had a greater chance as "diminutive... ethnic East Indians" to have a successful hearing as compared to African-Caribbean women who did not arouse the same kind of pity as they seemed to be "strong individuals who [could] make decisions to flee and [prove to be] survivors" (*CJWL* 73). The "passive, downtrodden Indian woman and the veiled Muslim one" had a greater chance of having her claim succeed than the Black woman who was stereotyped as a "mammy and... criminal" (*CJWL* 58, 75). The Muslim woman who expressed fears about the threat of female genital mutilation in her country of origin was deemed better qualified for refugee status than the self-professed feminist

Muslim woman who claimed persecution when she refused to wear the veil (*CJWL* 83, 79). This last, and publicised, case of 'Nada' is particularly interesting in revealing the 'democratic' agenda of the imperial trope:

> The press reports headlined the "feminist refugee" and ran pictures of veiled women alongside articles on the status of women in Saudi Arabia. Although Nada insisted that her experience had nothing to do with Islam and continued to insist on this in her public interviews and in a private communication with the author, she was mostly ignored on this point. Ultimately, her case generated support from a wide variety of women's and community groups, unions, and American organizations such as Middle East Watch, Equality Now, and the Association of the Bar of the City of New York. All these organizations championed Nada "for her commitment to independence and equality." Finally, the then leader of the opposition New Democratic Party, Ed Broadbent championed her cause in a lengthy article published in several newspapers. A number of editorials supported him. The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration responded to Mr Broadbent with the announcement at the end of January 1993 that Nada was granted status by ministerial discretion.
>
> (*CJWL* 80)

In the rest of her article, Razack offers "speculative" reasons as to why in each of these cases, "asylum is deliberately an individual remedy" which "reflects the difficulties women have when they cannot easily fit into their gender-based realities into an imperial frame" (*CJWL* 65, 74). She self-consciously and repeatedly calls her reasoning "speculative" as if to ward off accusations of partisan scholarship and because she cannot provide 'concrete proof' of 'racist' or 'sexist' or 'imperialist' behaviour in the nebulous area of the courtroom where intangible, intersecting frames of *reading the other* operate within the logic of a racist white settler state.

In addition to being *individual* judgments on the applicants, the opening of the asylum doors and constructing Canada as a humanitarian refuge haven is also an exercise in moral coercion and control over the nations from which these women flee. This despite the fact that in many cases, like in Trinidad and Tobago, during the official investigative process, the "task of demonstrating the inadequacy of state services for battered women... is, ironically, made considerably easier because there is an active women's movement and activists available to comment on the inefficacy of [their] services" (*CJWL* 71). For example, Razack cites Roberta Clarke, a Trinidadian feminist lawyer who asserts that that "while no activist would say that the situation in Trinidad and Tobago was a good one for battered woman... it is no worse than Canada's" (ibid). But such a frame of parity of women's oppression is inconceivable to most laypeople as well as immigration-specialists in Canada, which of course supports the self-conception of the benevolent nation. In such cases, native informants from the Caribbean are deliberately ignored not only in order to bolster Canada's 'human rights' reputation but also to deny *any* agency or active roles to women from the third world[35]. This leads to two outcomes: 1) the reification of the *strange* culture of the Other nation, or as outlined in Razack's article, a depiction of other nations as steeped in culturalised violence or a culture of violence, and 2) the relegation of *all* women from countries like Trinidad and Tobago, and for discursive purposes, *all* third world women, to underprivileged classes. Rescued by the benevolence of the Canadian state, this is also how such bodies then become 'women of colour' — oppressed there and oppressed here. Thus questions of native informancy assume significant weight in transnational feminist practice, something to which Razack addresses herself seriously, especially with reference to being Indo-Trinidadian.

To be Or Not To Be... Indian?

> Until this moment of writing, I had not considered what my scholarship had to do with the Indo-Caribbean diaspora or my own identity as an Indian woman born and raised in Trinidad but residing now in Canada.
>
> *Matikor* 155.

In 1999, Razack writes an article titled "Images of Indian Women in the Law: What Gender Images in the Diaspora Can Tell Us about Indianness." The article is occasioned by the response Razack gets when she presents her legal/academic work in a different site, not Canada, or as Brand would say, *In Another Place, Not Here*. The occasion is a conference on Indian diaspora held at the University of the West Indies in the summer of 1995. This is a moment of crisis for Razack: 1) she is 'returning home' "after an absence of twenty-two years" and 2) the theme of the panel — gender issues — brings to fore what she had "studiously avoided" so far in her career, "the meshing of" the narratives of Indo-Trinidadian asylum seekers in Canada and her own position as witness to both "racism of the First World and the violence of Indian communities" (*Matikor* 166). This moment of acknowledgement that she might be implicated pushes her to "examine the meaning of 'Indianness' both here and there and to ask how [her] Indianness might be different from theirs" (*Matikor* 155).

Razack summarises some of the case studies she had presented in the article on domestic violence and then goes on to discuss how 'Indian Women' figure in her mind. On the one hand, she viewed them as herself, "regulated by the stereotype of the passive, downtrodden Indian woman," and on the other, when focusing on "descriptions of domestic violence," she concluded that they were unlike herself (*Matikor* 165). She had "simply not encountered women subjected to such abuse" ever and felt compelled to distance herself from them (ibid). Conversations with her students, fellow lawyers and white Canadians made her wonder if she too had been brought up to feel "a paralyzing dependency" and so, imagining them evaluating her within this framework, she "quickly disavowed" any semblance between those women and her own situation. Eager to dispel "the ever-popular cultural deficit model of race relations, focusing on the dysfunction of [her] culture, and by implication, the health of theirs," i.e. Canadian culture, she "sought refuge in the emotionally safer ground of anti-racism" (ibid). But a different kind of interlocutor, insistent, insolent and intimate, faces her in the West Indies: the other side of her own self. She had imagined that an "analysis of gendered racism" was all she was bringing with her when she went to the conference. She had imagined that she would make "an argument for why we must not rely on racist tropes to get women in" because "only the most pitiable of victims will do" (*Matikor* 166). However, she finds now that in her overwhelming "concern over the perils of racism," she had "handily avoided considering the violence itself" (ibid). Moreover, she felt that situating the discussion of asylum at this end of the spectrum enabled her to ask some different, and equally important, but other kinds of questions:

> In Trinidad, however, away from the dailiness of white supremacy, and in the context of a conference on the India diaspora, I felt I could ask some of the questions that I could not in Canada: Are our communities, both in the Caribbean and in Canada, so deeply violent towards women that a young girl can be abused openly while the community looks on? Does Savi really have a "paralyzing dependency"? When we celebrate Indian arrival in the Caribbean, where do we put Savi and Indra and their abusers? If and when I claim my Indian heritage, what am I claiming? (*Matikor* 166).

In the Caribbean, Razack is implicated in a different kind of a narrative that positions her as someone complicit in "a priori colonial scholarship" leading to charges of "self-subalternization," a condition afflicting "those of us from the Third World who are securely based in the First World — those scholars who speak with power but identify with powerlessness" (Rey Chow qtd. *Matikor* 166, 167, underlining in original). Razack's research was deemed to sustain both "the stereotype of Indians as unpatriotic Trinidadians" and the image of "widespread violence" in Indo-Trinidadian families, something all the Trinidad newspapers seized upon negatively (*Matikor* 167). It seemed to Razack that no matter how hard she tried, "the story of the violence would ultimately disappear leaving only the story of the racism and the claims for asylum" and that her role as a Caribbean native informant *for* the Canadian state was only to be received in the light of a breach and betrayal, where she took from the stories of women like Savi and Indra to install her own superiority: "If they are not me, then I can be their saviour" (ibid). Razack thus finds herself caught in the quick sand of the native informant problem, where she can exercise the "institutional authority of the intellectual who recovers subjugated knowledge" only at the risk of "being both ungendered and without community" (*Matikor* 168). Her only recourse is to try and bring the "parallel themes" together and keep telling both sides of the stories, a difficult and draining task, a walk along the razor's edge.

Shahnaz Khan, in her work on a critique of the excesses of *Zina* ordinance explores the same problem, where she too is "complicit in the process of helping westerners save Pakistanis" (2017). In an article titled "Reconfiguring the Native Informant: Positionality in the Global Age," Khan refers to her work with attorneys in the U.S. who seek her 'expert' advice on Muslim women seeking asylum. With Neelam Husain, Rehana Yasmin, Rubya Mehdi, Farida Shaheeda and Khawar Mumtaz, Khan too "is uneasy about a western reading of accounts about the Muslim other" where "the social organization of knowledge and the structure of inquiry" discourages "an examination of the west and east as interconnected and instead encourages a focus on the two as ontological absolutes" (Khan 2020, 2024). As "a feminist committed to change," Khan believes that "patriarchy in the west supports patriarchy in the third world" and that feminists can come together "in international collaborative projects" to really "identify the ways in which patriarchy and capitalism work across national borders" (2025). While this is certainly the aim with which many of the feminists positioned in the West are taking up work in their nations of origin, real and imagined, there still remains the danger of why, where and how this knowledge is disseminated. How do *both* nations use this knowledge and in the interests of what? For example, Khan's article is published in *Signs* and has a specialised audience who may or may not already be in the know, whereas the damage that native informants like

Irshad Manji and Ayaan Hirsi Ali do in the larger arena of 'common' or 'global' knowledge about 'Muslim' women contributes only to reinforce the "Missionary Position" to which they are constantly subject, as Laila Lalami attests in her review of the latter's books and careers (23).

Razack seizes upon the trouble incipient in transnational work in a piece titled "Your Place or Mine? Transnational Feminist Collaboration." As is evident from the humorous, ironic title with its sexual innuendo that betrays the power differentials between nations connected by the prefix 'trans,' Razack in this article is again interested in location and logistics. This article is also the result of ruminations following another conference she attended with fellow feminists of Caribbean origin located in the North at the Annual Caribbean Studies Conference in Puerto Rico in 1996. Cutting to the chase right away, and wanting "to pay attention to geography and to argue for a place-based feminism," she states in the opening paragraph that the "setting [was] not incidental to how [she] experienced the event" (*ARF* 39):

> Suffused with a longing to "go home," to feel at home, of the see-saw of belonging and not belonging, enjoying being with scholars who still danced, I was aware, nonetheless, of the confusion of understanding myself to be a Canadian feminist scholar as well as a Caribbean one, and of a range of difficulties inherent in either label. This chapter grew out of my attempt to thread my way through the politics of location. (*ARF* 39)

If the site of the conference itself is taken to be a transnational space where feminists of different locations come together to discuss the very possibility and impact of their collaborations, then Razack's account of this conference details exactly how difficult the task is. As a transnational feminist, she is "implicated in the flow of ideas, labour and capital that marks the financialization of the globe" and in "the hierarchies in which [she is] both subordinated and privileged" (*ARF* 39, 40). She recognises correctly that her scholarship depends on "the context" in which she does her work, "the context in which it is received, and the regulatory practices of scholarly production in both regions" (*ARF* 41). Thus even though via transnational flows, scholars like Razack are scripted as native informants in the West, leaving them "only a very small space in which to negotiate responsible scholarship," they do "enjoy considerable access to a wide range of intellectuals, to books and to computers" (*ARF* 39). This is such a basic assertion of the material differences and conditions of scholarship between those in the North and the South, and yet this fact of the global flow of knowledge is still not widely recognised. After all, the politics of location has a particularly North American provenance, via Adrienne Rich (circa 1980s) and Caren Kaplan (1994) and only those who are *able* to straddle both locations, and cross borders with relative ease, can claim confusion or contradiction (however dubious a privilege that may be).

However, having made this important point, Razack moves on to discuss only how the Western "academy's relentless call for the authentic ethnic voice" leads to a "native informant dilemma" for those who are constructed as such (*ARF* 43, 42), suggesting that the location in which one makes one's living might exercise a greater hold on one's scholarship. This Authentic Native Informant is "permitted no specificities, no complexities with regard to class, histories or sexualities" (*ARF* 44). She remains a "useful item" in globalisation and her role in assisting in the First World politics of saving Third World women is one she declines at her peril (*ARF* 42). The threat is experienced most forcefully in women's studies locations. Here, the "dominant Western feminist project remains one in which white Western women often gain their entry into the category *citizen* through their role of taking care of their less fortunate sisters of colour" (*ARF* 45). Thus the feminist nation again flexes its muscles. At this site, "undifferentiated Third World Others legitimately fear that [they] will be dismissed if [they] begin to discuss class privilege (*ARF* 46-47). Razack chooses here to privilege racial disadvantage over any discussion of class positions in the academy.

> I know that I have shied away from discussing *both* my origins as a working-class, Indo-Caribbean woman and my recent elevation to the middle class. Confessing the former identity, I often experience the drop in the status that comes from being a "kitchen Indian" from Trinidad, a "watered down, not good grade A Indian" who does not speak an Asian language and who is not sufficiently authentic (Mootoo 1993: 45). Alternatively, if I note my current middle-class status, I experience a quick dismissal as someone who does not really *know* about poor women. In either case, knowing is connected to being and to authenticity.... Northern feminists of colour are in the classic double bind. (*ARF* 47, 49)

This is where Razack and I begin to part company. In the rest of her article, Razack tries to complicate the ways in which we can "think more strategically... what it means in practice to disrupt the hierarchies in which we are caught" but her "place-based feminism" does not really manage to emerge from "the belly of the beast, as the North is sometimes described" (*ARF* 47, 53). Here, she seems to be completely trapped by the early-Foucauldian analyses of power as only hierarchical governmentality or domination. To offer a quick synopsis, for Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, domination "refers to conditions under which the subordinated have relatively little room for manouevre" and government is concerned with "how to conduct the conduct of the state and the population which the state claims to rule" (Hindess 97, 98). Within such a structure, there is little that subjects can do but to regulate their own behaviour. Razack acknowledges the rift between her respective speaking positions in the North and the South as well as attempts to explain her own investment in the transformation her class position entails, but nevertheless, she seems to be caught between possessing knowledge and not knowing what to do with it. Her most affective affiliation of identity, Indo-Trinidadianness, and the cringe factor she associates with it, catches up with her. This is surely a failure of nerve on the part of a theorist as astute and alert as her.

My quick and dirty solution to Razack's dilemma is to offer that one cannot shy away from the double bind. One has to talk about what one *knows* whether one is *acquiring* or *unlearning* privilege: it is the only ethical way to teach and practice politics. Maybe it is fatigue, maybe it is the prospect of not ever being able to see the light of day in the foggy quagmire of identity politics of the North, but Razack's sincere intention to highlight what she doesn't share with her feminist sisters of the South does not follow up in the primary site of her practice, the academy. Such an obfuscation of class identity at the expense of colour leads to a tricky pedagogic practice throughout Razack's work. To illustrate this, I take up two of her essays, ""Storytelling for Social Change" (*Returning the Gaze*, referred to as *RG* hereafter, 1993), and "Racialized immigrant women as native informants in the academy" (*Seen but not heard: aboriginal* *women and women of color in the academy*, referred to as *SBNH* hereafter, 2001), forming bookends to her career in Canada so to speak.

In "Storytelling for Social Change," Razack discusses the salience of different kinds of narratives in the service of a "critical pedagogy" that will enable "an ethical vision based on our differences (*RG* 83, 90). She takes up a couple of her illustrative experiences in teaching at a summer college in human rights at the University of Ottawa circa the early 1990s. Sponsored by the non-governmental Human Rights Research and Education Centre, this college brought together "sixty human rights activists" who were members of disabled women's groups, anti-racist groups, the Assembly of First Nations, lawyers for human rights in South Africa etc. (*RG* 91). The first incident describes how a male member of a dominant group demands that a female member of a subordinate group speak up, in keeping with the curriculum that was "designed to encourage story-telling" (ibid). This unreasonable demand instantly dissolves the trust of group and makes the learning environment unsafe. The second incident is provoked by classroom responses to the Oka crisis that was unfolding in Canada as the time. Paralysis due to guilt, the expectation that people involved in similar political projects should predominantly care and empathise, or else should become friends, are responses that demand more of a political response from pedagogy then is possible for Razack to provide at this moment. Both incidents lead her to "reflect on classroom ethics" and the scenario that unfolds when groups committed to social change resort to an us/them or good/bad mentality or method (*RG* 93). The article is explorative in nature and does not suggest any concrete solutions, except offer Spivak's injunction that in the classroom, it is our "responsibility to trace the other in self" (qtd. *RG* 100).

Ten years later, Razack participates in a Symposium at Carleton University that addresses issues of equity in the academy for women of colour and Aboriginal women. The speakers include Patricia Monture-Angus, Wanda Thomas Bernard, Joanne St. Lewis, Rashmi Luther, Elizabeth Whitmore and Bernice Moreau. The symposium explores the continuing discriminatory practices against racialised women at the institutional level, where Razack concludes that "the academy is so consistently racist and predictable... that it is impossible to make sense of the contradictions that we encounter" (*SBNH* 51). She laments the dire absence of a viable "brown space" in the "colonial space" of "academic imperialism" and advocates "increasing the numbers as our pre-eminent strategy of resistance" (*SBNH* 52, 53). She goes on to delineate various ways in which academics of colour are kept out of the meritocracy in academic spaces: in hiring committees, in the publishing industry, on the tenure track. She confesses herself to be impaled on "the horns of the dilemma" between privileging every other kind of writing and the kinds that go into referred journals (*SBNH* 57). Last, she advocates a support structure in which new entrants of colour be told "the rules" of the game:

> While we are figuring out how to change the rules, we have to figure out a way to just get through the interim. Like Patricia Monture-Angus, I was never told, "Don't give your written work away to books and book chapters." Three book chapters later, I have realized that they weren't counting book chapters, they were counting refereed journals. We need to find out a way to tell each other simple things like this. (*SBNH* 59)

This, for me, is a huge disappointment. After encountering a theorist who wanted to address all the ways in which *the gaze* could be circumvented, I did not want to be told that all I could do was to play by the rules of the game. Where once Razack had started out by promising a way out of the quagmire of colour, she was now suggesting that the only thing to do was to carve out a cosy niche in which one could remain protected by coloured camouflage, for a little while at least. This capitulation, "while we figure out a way to get through" seems all the more blasphemous when Razack actually does much more significant and politically charged work in her latest 2004 book, *Dark Threats & White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism*. In this, she explores anew the ways in which the Canadian nation-state perpetuates institutionalised racism in the very peace-keeping forces which contribute to its vaunted international reputation as a country committed to human-rights. There seems to be a schism between academic writing and practice for Razack, which is even more pronounced in the following, last soundbyte from the Carleton University symposium:

> If the dominant understanding of race and racism is in terms of 'difference,' then the only possible space for professors of colour and students of colour is to help in this project of managing the difference.... The Native informant role us also a classed and straight one, so you can't have any working class attributes or be politically and openly 'out', since this raises suspicions that you might not play the Native informant role well.... I want to say to the students of colour that you, too, are scripted as Native informants in the classroom. But you will be bumped out of the classroom and will create a ruckus if you start insisting that we look at racism. That is the way it works in the university. (*SBNH* 53, 56)

This kind of talk, at the level of creating a privileged, albeit abject, brown space in the academy is careless at best and irresponsible at worst. Instead of giving the students and other conference participants a tool for understanding the intersecting ways in which race, class, gender, ability, nationality and sexuality work in the institution and in society at large, Razack's tonality and tenor always already scripts learners and long-time practitioners as victims and martyrs. The various parametres by which identity is now constructed might be a tired old formula, but we still need to keep on learning and re-learning how they operate in society. Razack does admit at the end of her talk that "when you have been scripted in the Native informant space for many years, it messes up your head a little" (*SBNH* 59), but surely advocating a mere "collectivity" of brown bodies who have no agency is neither the answer nor desirable? It is here that I would like to take Razack back to her own words in the important essay, "To Essentialize or Not to Essentialize: Is This the Question?"

> Before we can determine how far we can go, either in essentializing or not essentializing, we need to examine how we explain to ourselves the social hierarchies that surround us. We need to ask: Where am I in this picture? Am I positioning myself as the saviour of less fortunate peoples? as the progressive one? as more subordinated? as innocent? These are moves of superiority as we need to reach beyond them. I return here to my notion of a politics of accountability as opposed to a politics of inclusion. Accountability begins with tracing the relations of privilege and penalty. It cannot proceed unless we examine our complicity. Only then can we ask questions about how we are understanding differences and for what purpose. (*LWP* 170)

Creating 'a brown space' in the institution:

This chapter has hopefully demonstrated that in order to actively and ethically organise against racism, we cannot accept and *adjust* to the very terms and labels imposed upon us by the capitalist white-settler state. Instead, we have to forge out a new language, a new way of doing politics that not only makes visible the historical colonial and class connotations of these racial terms, but actively disengages them from our imaginaries of ethical, moral and political possibility, a real attempt at decolonising *the mind* so to speak. I do realise this is a challenging and psychically daunting task, one that requires us to leave all our comfort zones behind, and marshall all the forces of our accustomed privilege against our very selves. But as a starry-eyed as well as politically informed entrant into the academy, where I want to use my writing and pedagogy to make the rules of engagement transparent at the very same time that I want to advocate a transformative politics, I do not want to settle for anything less idealist. I want to find out what makes my identity as a scholar tick at the very same time that I want to connect it to other affective modalities of my being.

As a way to understand some of the intangible and imperceptible motivations and manifestations of these identities, I have recently turned to the work on 'race' being done by South Asian scholars in psychoanalytic and phenomenological frames, even though I have little grounding in their foundational tenets. Again, it is because I have taken my *experience* as a starting point for initiating such quests for understanding that I find these theorists useful. Because they speak in a language familiar to me, most importantly in analyses of caste, I am beginning to synthesise some of my understandings of the processes of racialisation of South Asian scholars in the postcolonial and transnational fields[36]. I am particularly cognisant of the caste-and-religious markers vis-à-vis racialised markers of difference theorized by Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks as a "regime of visibility" that goes "beyond simple historical or material explanation" to explore the "psychical import of race" (2000, 158, 2) and which Falguni A Sheth sees as a technology of "enframing and taming the unruly" (2007, 77). Ranjana Khanna's focus on the "everyday as affect" (2003, 213) and Debjani Ganguly's research on the caste system in India as a way of making transparent the "life-form" of the subcontinent (2005, 2, though I am not convinced of her 'happy' take on the 'dalit everyday') are useful ways of conceptualising contemporary social subjectivity. Their attention to other, equally formative ingredients in the production of identity and subjectivity clues us in to the complexity of the processes, the "something social, something categorical, something emotional" that Farhad Dalal contends is at the heart of regimes of 'looking for race' (12)[37].

Although these South Asian postcolonial scholars working through psychoanalysis and phenomenology, and sociology and anthropology, can clearly be ranged on contradictory and opposing sides, I have found their work useful for decoding the official governmental identificatory tag of 'visible minorities' that Canada imposes upon its immigrant peoples and the effect it has on feminist theorising, especially in Bannerji and Razack. In fact, these dialectical readings have been crucial for mapping my own overarching frame of hotfooting around essentialism. I am not interested in an ontological excavation of 'race'; others better qualified than me in Enlightenment texts have done this necessary and enabling work. But I find myself agreeing with Sheth that every attempt to understand "what race is" focuses on and *reifies* the "received view" of race "as biological in the attempt to confirm or shed doubt on it" (81). This is what Seshadri-Crooks would call "the inaugural signifier of race" as "Whiteness" that "implicates us all equally in a logic of difference" (3). In this logic, it is "visibility" as a "regime of looking that thrives on 'major' and 'minor' details in order to shore up one's symbolic position" (Seshadri-Crooks 2). These details are absorbed as 'common sense' knowledge, either through discourses of "Race as Color, Blood and Genealogy" or through "Political Othering" in "structures and worldviews such as colonialism, orientalism and imperialism" (Sheth 79). Both *systemically* seek to create "forms of understanding populations as different or 'other' through race" (Sheth 80) in white settler colonies and foment a language for their foreignness and alien occupation. Sara Ahmed (and Dalal too[38]) identifies this as the "recognizing," "embodying" and 'knowing" of Others as a production of "stranger danger" in the imagination of the assumed, shared, 'cohesive' community, the neighbourhood and the nation (19-55). As I suggest in my "Introduction," this is how the feminist 'nation' operates as well.

With Seshadri-Crooks, I too am interested in "how and why do we read certain marks of the body as privileged sites of racial meaning" and then arbitrarily choose them as generative of political "group formations and identification" (2). Agreeing with Seshadri-Crooks' starting premise that "the regime of visibility secures the investment that we make in 'race,' and there are good reasons why such an investment cannot be easily given up," I am also one with her conclusion that the dismantling of 'race' can only happen by "discolorations" and surrendering the "regime of looking"

(2, 158). For me, attention to and analyses of the *moments* of an internal examination or self-directed inwardly look, the inspection of the *psychic awakening* and the *permission for (indeed injunction to)* race-talk, and the subsequent awareness of oneself as *not* responding to this regime, is crucial for understanding the *bildungsroman* of politics and identity of South Asian postcolonial subjects who (cor)respond to a 'white' scale and standard of being in settler colonies. I am reminded of course of Indian freedom fighter and *satyagrahi*[39] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's non-cooperation movement in the struggle for Indian independence, that frustrated, stymied and *invalidated* the (non-sensical) logic of imperial violence and power. Following his dicta in spirit, I too make a somewhat idealistic appeal of non-cooperation with the rhetoric and logic of 'race'.

Endnotes

[1] Himani Bannerji grew up in what was then East Pakistan and is now called Bangladesh. Thus, the naming of both India and Pakistan as her nations of origin.

[2] Habitual as derived from and pertaining to one's habitat (one's preferred surroundings) as well as habitus ((a person's physical constitution or physique, deportment, appearance, nature). *The Penguin English Dictionary* 2nd Edition.

[3] This is the opposite argument to what is usually made in the case of diasporic communities that are usually seen to be unduly and overly invested in the home/land left behind. In questioning their pre-occupation with state and socio-political domination in their new space of occupation, I am not presenting a binary nor denying the multiplicity of their existence.

[4] This is a far more felicitous and voluntary mode of 'expulsion' than the current practice of 'recruiting' qualified professionals under the point system in the Canadian immigration laws and then subjecting them to costly, time-consuming and impossible-to-jump-over-hoops in the 'standardisation' routines of medicine, law, education etc. Almost everyone in Canadian urban spaces has perhaps had a brush with that ubiquitous higher-education degree-holder who now drives a cab or cleans the toilets, and who came to Canada in the hopes of a 'better life' that was not defined by a complete alienation from the modes of living he/she was trained for. I do want to qualify this statement in one way: this 'expulsion' is not limited only to visible minorities but stretches across the colour lines in separate, but equal modes of discrimination.

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[5] It is interesting to note the contrast between Bannerji's feminist readings and the mostly male, third world revolutionary readings.

[6] This repeated insistence on 'blackness' as a metaphor is actually a very important way of thinking about racialisation. If 'whiteness' is a metaphor for establishing and maintaining colonial and neo-colonial power relations, then one way of opposing the destructive force can be through the binary of 'black' looking back or returning the gaze. This is problematic of course in assuming the possibility of any such political solidarity or unity, and implies an engagement with the politics of race at the least.

[7] As explained in the "Introduction," Bannerji is one of the many scholars of colour to begin her journey of politicisation and race-conscientisation with Frantz Fanon's appeal to solidarity and questioning the regime of looking, but she is one of the few who also takes to heart Fanon's cautions against the pitfalls of nationalism, cultural and ethnicised.

[8] The trope of the journey and language lost is common to other migrant Canadian writers like Eva Hoffman, Josef Svorecky, David Bezgomis etc. as well as indigenous writers like Tomson Highway, Marilyn Dumont, Louise Bernice Halfe. Both are symptoms of an official multicultural policy.

[9] This privilege is stripped metaphorically at the port of entry into a white-settler nation-state: markers of class, caste, religion, language and other social significants can become obscured by the state-sanctioned categories like 'visible minority' in Canada and ethnicised labels in the U.S.

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[10] Notice that the list of names of revolutionary heroes is entirely male, something I signal in the previous chapter as identified by Wini Breines in her analysis of black nationalist and white socialist feminists in the movement years.

[11] For example, Mahasweta Devi makes the point that 'women' as the sole and identified subjects of 'feminism' cannot be lifted by the roots of their hair from the trap of patriarchy. The move against patriarchy has to take different routes in societies that are differently arranged, differentiated and understood than Western/Northern ones.

[12] Please see Malavika Karlekar's recent book that reproduces some of the contents of the photo exhibition and traveling display, "Re-presenting Indian Women 1875-1947: A Visual Documentary." *Visualizing Indian Women: 1875-1947*. New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies/Oxford University Press, 2006.

[13] This situation has of course changed now, given the sustained attack against women's rights under rising and vicious religious fundamentalism in the subcontinent.

[14] Allusion to Edward Said's 1999 memoir, "an extraordinary story of exile and a celebration of an irrevocable past" (from the blurb).

[15] See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Inderpal Grewal, Kumari Jayawardena, Antoinette Burton etc.

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[16] The politics of 'coming out' as someone with an 'alternative sexuality' or 'queerness' has a similar oppressive resonance and injunction in the global West/North.

[17] Bannerji would explain this in Marxist terms as the *doing* of *ideology* through an active epistemological gesture, whose method of production is uncovered by the "three tricks." *IS* 27.

[18] Audrey Kobayashi talks about the disciplining structures of social scenes, sports and sartorial considerations in "The Paradox of Difference and Diversity (or, Why the Threshold Keeps Moving)" in John Paul Jones III, Heidi Jnast & Susan M Roberts eds. *Thresholds in Feminist Geography: Difference, Methodology, Representation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997. 3-9.

[19] I do not have the same relationship to Bengaliness, in terms of place, language or literariness as outlined in "The Sound Barrier" but the sentiments expressed therein strike a cord with my sense of displacement in diaspora.

[20] I think this may have to do with the foundational practices of the establishment of feminism as a discipline with institutional sanction, where white women saw themselves as the founders, key holders and gate-keepers to membership as well as knowledge production. Postcolonialism, on the other hand, began with the challenge to European epistemology and Enlightenment teleology and has had to have discussions about who can speak at the inaugural moments itself.

[21] It might be argued that this is the purpose of education after all, wherever one is. This is why the theme of the diasporic journey as *bildungsroman* is crucial to my thinking about identity.

[22] A point stressed by Neil Larson in *The Pre-occupation of Postcolonial Studies*. Aijaz Ahmed is of course the progenitor of this seminal discussion in the field of postcolonialism (and I use the masculinist words advisedly). See especially his "Languages of Class, Ideologies of Immigration" in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992. 73-94.

[23] This is an argument that Spivak makes too in her critique of the Subaltern school, but Bannerji glosses over her work as also of other postcolonial feminist scholars who have undertaken similar studies. In interrogating the hothouse fame and prominence of postcolonial studies in Anglo-North America, Bannerji gets carried away and denounces the whole lot in one lumpen category. My reading is that her main objection is to the masculinist Subaltern Studies school rather than feminist postcolonial work, to which she does not pay adequate attention. Spivak herself would share Bannerji's disquiet about the 'woman question' in the work done by Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty. See "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." in Spivak. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York & London: Routledge, 1987.

[24] I am grateful to Iman Mersal for drawing attention to the other histories of consciousnesses of diasporic lives, which are hidden in the everyday world of the diaspora. She talks about this in an unpublished paper titled, "Eliminating Diasporic Lives" which has been solicited by *PMLA*. Also, M G Vassanji's phrases and apt titles for the burden diasporic bodies carry. *The Gunny Sack* (1989) and *The Book of Secrets* (1994).

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[25] In this lecture, given at the Feminism and the Critique of Colonial Discourse Conference, U.C. Santa Cruz, April 25, 1987, Minh-ha argues: "Differences do not only exist between outsider and insider — two entities. They are also at work within the outsider herself, or the insider herself — a single entity. She who knows she cannot speak of them without speaking of herself, of history without involving her story, also knows that she cannot make a gesture without activating the to and fro movement of life." However, Minh-ha then goes on to present this as a defense against the 'Western' charge of the lack of "psychological conflict" in her work. In her answer, "conflicts in Western contexts often serve to define identities" and she makes the case that "difference" should replace "conflict"! This seems to me to be the other side of the same coin of identity-fixing and the very opposite of the "to and fro" fluidity and flexibility of subjectivity she articulates in the rest of the talk.

[26] Sara Ahmed. "Is Affect Multicultural?" *Feeling Multicultural: Decolonizing Affect Theory Colloquium.* Centre for Women's and Gender Studies, The University of British Columbia. Editing and DVD Production: io media productions ltd., 2007.

[27] Reference to Cherrie Moraga and Gloria E Anzaldúa eds. *This Bridge Called My Back.*

[28] Here I have to refer to Canadian collections of anti-racist writings as well as conferences and workshops spaces where Bannerji is cited by almost every other feminist scholar and critic of multiculturalism. Important among these are Carl E James and Adrienne Shadd eds. *Talking About Difference: Encounters in Culture, Language and Identity* and *Talking About Identity: Encounters in Race, Ethnicity and Language*, Enakshi Dua ed. *Scratching the surface:*

Canadian, anti-racist, feminist thought, etc. Conferences like *ERA 21: End Racism Activism* in Vancouver (2000), *Critical Race Theory* conference in Toronto (2002) etc.

[29] I have the same problem in adopting wholesale a lesbian identity. Having being schooled and subjectivised in compulsory heterosexuality, many aspects of which were and continue to be sources of pleasure, I do not see how that aspect of my subjectivity can be totally obliterated and erased to be replaced by a new, emancipatory one. Also, I would theorise lesbian identity and alternative sexualities as in constant contact, dialogue and negotiation with heterosexuality and patriarchy. Again, here, the personal/private and the political/public come into productive tension, conflict and therefore dialogue for me. See also Sagri Dhairyam's interesting piece on "Racing the Lesbian, Dodging White Critics." in Laura Doan ed. *The Lesbian Postmodern*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. 25-41.

[30] I would like to emphasise that I am not drawing a teleological line here. Even within the genre of the *bildungsroman*, there is room to privilege different moments of epiphany. So even though the subject at the end of the road may arrive at one particular destiny, it is entirely possible that another reading or version of the wayside episodes of the song of the road/journey will lead her to a completely different conclusion. Of course, here the coming together of *bildungsroman* and history entails an epistemological problem. If history is what happened before and it telling a way of understanding what is happening now, then we have to contend with the problem of teleology. However, this is where revisionist history, which is what postcolonial and feminist scholarship is engaged in, offers us a way out. We are reminded again and again that official

history is told by the victors and there is always another, if not multiple other, version/s.

[31] One can compare this to the kind of social reform work being incited and instigated by journalists like W T Stead in Victorian England, with respect to both moral regulation at home and trade regulation abroad.

[32] This is a point Spivak too notes in terms of Japanese women's modernity. Spivak takes the example of Rei Kawakubo, the founder of fashion house, Comme des Garçons, and argues that "the privileged inhabitant of neo-colonial space is often bestowed a subject-position as geo-political other by the dominant radical. (One is most struck by this when planning or attending international conferences)" (*CPR* 339). Thus, "Kawakubo's avowal is inscribed on a chain of displacements that accommodates it: 'I have always felt it important not to be confined by tradition or custom or geography' legitimates its opposite: 'To the West Japan must present herself as Asian,' as Samuel Huntington legitimates McLuhan" (*CPR* 341).

[33] Bannerji makes distinctions between national liberation and nationalist movements.

[34] In this context, Ranu Samantrai makes an important distinction: "The black British (African Caribbean and South Asian) feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s is instructive in this regard not only because it took up a position of dissent relative to other, more dominant affiliative sites but because it was founded on conflict and was consistently troubled by the dissent of its own affiliates. For instance, it could not consolidate its subject, the black woman, or settle questions regarding the adequacy of its representational reach or the coherence of its

political agenda. But this lack of certainty at its heart forced its affiliates to forgo the quest for consensus and instead develop an aesthetic of conflict" ("Introduction." *AlterNatives: Black Feminism in the Postimperial Nation.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. 1).

[35] Examples of such generalised as well as theorised abuse of native informancy abound in everyday journalism and pedagogy in Canada. Here, the fourth estate does not only fail in its duty to its citizenry to keep them well-informed and educated, but it actually acts as an arm of the nation-state to push its agenda. The situation is exacerbated as the nation has access to only two national dailies of any credibility (compare this to at least ten national dailies in the English language alone, and a couple at least in each of India's eighteen official languages)!

To cite just one such example, Marcus Gee at the moment is writing for the AsiaPacific Bureau of *The Globe and Mail* and angling each story to serve as a pithy moral for domestic as well as foreign policy and practice in Canada. In one article, Gee takes up the case of the Dalit revolt in Rajasthan where members of the Gujjars tribe are agitating to be demoted to the Meena tribe, so as to avail of affirmative action quotas established by the Indian government. Gee concludes that this should be a good example for Canada to not indulge in affirmative action. In the second piece, published in the business section of the *G&M*, Gee compares the public sector services of the Government of India, specifically the airline industry, unfavourably with the spanky new private entrants into the market. This then becomes a celebration of private industry and capitalism over public services and socialism. Not only does Gee paint the two very diverse situations in black and white terms, but also become socio-cultural and political analyst and economic business advisor at the same time. This is indeed how Canada has done business for a long time.

For another example of this, see Nega Mezlekia's 2000 expose in *Notes from the Hyena's Belly* of how the Canadian government funded the military junta in Ethiopia and how Canada then opened its arms to the refugees from there: "After all, the military junta I'd left behind received a substantial amount of financial assistance from Pierre's Trudeau's administration.... I have nothing but good things to say about the Canadian people. I have only wished that they, like much of the Western world, could be more considerate of the welfare of those who live in distant places" (350). Sheema Khan's articles on the 'culturally other woman' too maintain an attentive roster of how these Canadian politics become a way of policing its visible minorities in law and in media. In such 'analyses,' specificity not only vanishes, but a generalised 'bad situation' in the 'Other' nation proves how wonderful it is to belong to an advanced capitalist nation like Canada, notwithstanding the fact the exact problems in different names and situations exist here too.

[36] I am aware of Asish Nandy's charge that in analysing these methods of social stratification, we, i.e. postcolonial Indian scholars have often resorted to 'mimicry'.

[37] Farhad Dalal is an analyst of group psychotherapy and clinical psychoanalytic practice in a metropolitan British context. He works not so much with the academic psychoanalytic oevure of Julia Kristeva or Jacques Lacan, but concentrates on the British psychoanalytic school, mainly Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, Ronald Fairbairn, Donald Winnicott and also the direct address of race by Frantz Fanon.

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[38] Dalal talks about "creating others" (53) through "group formation" (58), which works by "projection" and the invocation of "the stranger" and "the scapegoat" (117).

[39] *Satyagraha*: the appeal to truth, was the slogan under which Gandhi organised the Quit India movement as also the right to *swadeshi*, i.e. the right to self-governance, self-manufacture (of salt, cotton clothing etc.)

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Everybody's Afraid of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak!: Interviewing the Postcolonial Critic/Strategic Feminist/Native Informant

> I am not erudite enough to be interdisciplinary, but I can break rules.
>
> Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present.*

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Literary theorist. Postcolonial critic[1]. Interlocutor of and with third world feminists. Translator of Jacques Derrida and Mahasweta Devi. Terry Eagleton's bête noire. Inveterate interviewee. Indian. South Asian. Public Intellectual. Cited for the English word "deconstruction" by the *Compact O.E.D.* 1991 ("Lives" 213). The presumed subject of postmodern Bengali poet, Binoy Majumdar's 1976 collection, *Phire Eso Chaka!*[2] Self described "para-disciplinary, ethical philosopher" (http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Spivak.html). Since 1963, Spivak has commented and written on almost every event of socio-political significance that has followed the disintegration of a colonial world and is related to the rise of a neocolonial one, making it legitimate, indeed necessary, fodder for literary, textual and institutional discussion. Spivak's body of work is a testament to, and continuing commentary on, our times, or as she would say, it is a gesture "toward a history of the vanishing present" (subtitle of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 1999, referred to as *CPR* hereafter).

In documenting the developments in the Anglo-American academy in the last forty-five years, Spivak chronicles the state of contemporary feminist politics[3], the spectacular (in both senses of the word) rise of postcolonial theory, the tensions between the native informant, the investigating subject and the postcolonial third-world teacher, the international division of labour and the political economy of Southern women, the usurpation of literary criticism by cultural studies, the thorny narratives of 'experience' and identity politics, the complicated relationship between political correctness, minority and marginalization studies and affirmative action models, the 'emancipatory' discourses of development studies, enlightenment values and human rights, and finally, the question of academic freedom. As Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean state in *The Spivak Reader* (referred to hereafter as *SR*), "Spivak is among the foremost feminist critics who have achieved international eminence, and one of the few who can claim to have influenced intellectual production on a truly global scale" (2)[4].

Spivak is cited by numerous scholars in disciplines as varied as aboriginal literatures, anthropology, cultural studies, education, English, gay and lesbian studies, history, international and area studies, linguistics, philosophy, political science, sociology, translation and women's studies. Her influence, in fact, is not limited only to academic circles, but has found its way into the innards of popular culture. For example, in *Desilicious: Sexy, Subversive, South Asian*, a recent collection of erotic writing by The Masala Trois Collective (2005), Milan Bose gives us a South Asian version of *Sex and the City*, where four eligible desi girls (of subcontinental indian origin[5]) muse upon what it would feel like to date a desi male in North America. One of the characters, Rush, chides her friends: "What are you really, really after with an Indian guy? What is Indian anyway? It's not a place, it's just a sensibility, an understanding, but why can't you get that from other non-Indian guys who just understand what it's like to be outside, to be other?" Her friend, the narrator, analyses this interrogation as follows:

> Rush dipped into her repertoire of deconstruction riffs while getting philosophical about relationships. She had her psychoanalysis phase a few years ago and was now moving into a Gaytri [sic] Spivak moment. It all depended on who was staying at the apartment really. (75)

That Spivak should pop up in this fashion in an open cultural context is not really surprising. Spivak has bridged the oft-perceived gap between theory and practice when it comes to analysing identity and interpellation[6] in terms of essentialism and experience. It is pertinent to note here that given the number of English-speaking people of 'South Asian' origin and given that many of them who write creatively also engage in theory in the contemporary humanities, it was but a matter of time before Spivak emerged to gloss *anything* and *everything* related to essentialist categories of longing and belonging, of the naming and claiming of experience. That Spivak is a consummate spinner of strategic identity-making is evident most of all in her interviews, where she hops from one malleable category to another—Indian, South Asian, feminist, literary theorist, public intellectual, modernist, deconstructionist, etc.—in order to theorise what has come to be known as the diasporic and the postcolonial condition. This chapter reads Spivak through her interviews, a formidable body of work in itself, where she not only articulates strategic essentialism but performs it.

The Interview and the Public Intellectual:

> Interviews are the children of opportunity... careful fictions, conjuring the promise of the actual from the signs of the present.
>
> Peter Osborne *A Critical Sense: Interviews with Intellectuals.*

Spivak takes her place among many other thinkers in the Humanities and the Social Sciences who are involved in the business of texting the world and of worlding the text[7], and who enter and transform the "'quasi-utopian space'" of the Western university in "'spiritual, not economic" terms (Edward Said ctd. by Osborne xvi). She shares common ground with fellow academics who have come to be known as public intellectuals[8], i.e. critics who offer "'counter-discourses'" to their "'merely professional routines'" (Foucault and Said ctd. by Osborne xvi), and thereby create social capital and "cultural power"[9]. These academics trace their lineage to a tradition of inquiry based on rhetoric and politics, a domain that erstwhile belonged to Socrates and Cicero in classical Rome, precursors to contemporary public forms and fora of democracy. Aijaz Ahmad, M Jacqui Alexander, Gloria Anzaldúa, Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, Dipesh Chakraborty, Partha Chatterjee, Pheng Cheah, Noam Chomsky, Angela Davis, Jacques Derrida, Terry Eagleton, Michel Foucault, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Henry Giroux, Stuart Hall, bell hooks, Frederic Jameson, June Jordan, Marshall McLuhan, Trinh T Minh-Ha, Edward Said, E San Juan Jr., Renata Salecl, Chela Sandoval, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Tzvetan Todorov, Cornel West, Raymond Williams, Slavoj Zizeck, have all been, at one time or another, members of this elite intellectual club that is constantly called upon, and chooses, to make public pronouncements on issues that ostensibly lie outside the purview of the academy.

The above list is not a random or arbitrary one. A closer examination of each of these names reveals that all these academics come from a background of close engagement with revolutionary politics, Marxist, feminist and anti-colonial, and that their present position and prominence within universities is not a matter of natural existence, inheritance or succession, but the result of sustained political action and agitation in the public sphere[10]. All these academics occupy the position of what Peter Osborne calls the "intellectual as moral hero" (Osborne xiv), and they profess to what Chela Sandoval identifies as a "differential" or "oppositional consciousness" (Sandoval 54.4). Osborne traces the evolution of this figure through various intellectual-philosophical movements in the modern world and concludes that it draws its life-blood from "an exclusion from power," aspires towards "a radical democratic public sphere" and contributes toward the "development of a civic republicanism for more highly differentiated societies, in a state of constant interaction and internal flux" (xiv, xv). Within such a context, Sandoval envisions a "citizen-subject" who can "learn to identify, develop and control the means of ideology, that is, marshal the knowledge necessary to 'break with ideology' while at the same time also speaking in, and from within, ideology" (44.4). It is no coincidence either that many of these academics enter the domain of public space via the interview, a site which authorises and validates the critic's theoretical pronouncements on the larger world by bringing her into intimate contact with that world.

The interview provides the academic an opportunity to face-up to her own theory by encountering it tête-à-tête (head-to-head).

The interview, according to Osborne, is "a paradigmatically modern genre" that epitomizes "modern philosophy's claim on the present" through the "figure of the intellectual" (viii). Academics who wish to inhabit this sphere are highly conscious of public methods of interrogation and use them to mobilize ideas. They choose the interview as a means of direct interlocution with their chosen constituency[11]. The interview, for them, functions as a means of bridging the gap between the 'real world' and the 'ivory tower,' proving that the space of the university is not simply the hallowed ground of esoteric knowledge and jargon-infused theory, but that there is an intimate link between the social world outside and the processes of knowledge production inside; that the space of the university is also a space where one learns one's place in the world and discovers the means of transforming it. Academics use the intimate, yet public, genre of the interview to provide a new, improved, social inter-face for intellectual work (adjectives that testify to a corporatised reality of contemporary academe). The interview brands (in both senses of the word) the academic as an inter-active commodity, making her accessible in multi-media forms. The interview also operates as a zone free from the rigid writing structures of the university, since it is not as limited a form or genre as the traditional academic essay, monograph or book. However subject to academic vetting and editorial processes, it still offers loose and open possibilities for intellectuals to articulate an alternative, if institutional, subject position. The added bonus is that even as they inspire and instigate democratic debate, the interviews feed a burgeoning body of published work which further consolidates the position of the intellectual within the 'publish or perish' scenario of the academy.

In an individualized, celebrity culture, the speaking persona of the critic demands a body to correspond (with), a body not confined to words on a page, but made concrete in the corporeal world. The interview now provides such an embodied encounter, which somehow magically transforms the words on the page into actual action, and is seen as a legitimate way to bridge the gap between academic inquiry and activist practices. It brings the intellectual into the world of which she speaks, brings her socio/physio/psycho-logical being into dialogue with her theoretical articulations about the world, so as to situate her as an entity who *belongs* to the geopolitico-historical as well as corporeal sphere of the world. These academics thus tease out a very fine balance between Antonio Gramsci's delineations of the traditional versus the organic intellectual, via interviews, which are increasingly becoming their preferred mode of academic address[12]. As public intellectuals, they harness the interview form to critique and comment upon contemporary society, to persuade and incite public debate, and to carve out alternative speaking positions within and "outside *in* the teaching machine" (from the title of Spivak's 1993 book).

Spivak is a useful figure for tracking how current academic criticism has achieved a makeover into social and public intellectual work. Spivak, who derives her theoretical acumen from the principles of modern business and warfare as much as the dharmasastras and Derrida, is an astute user of the public domain[13]. She has given 45 interviews so far (see detailed appendix), from 1963 to 2006, an output comparable perhaps only to Noam Chomsky, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Edward Said. This prodigious number testifies not merely to the impact of Spivak's work on contemporary theory, but also to how the nature of academic production in general has changed dramatically in recent years. No longer are academics mere producers of abstract theory in dry tomes; they now practise "an art that falls somewhere between writing and performance" (Veeser xiii). This is the art of autobiographical criticism, of confessional and subjective interpretation, where critics are not just objective commentators on the subject in question, but are fully implicated—as (corpo)real bodies—within the processes of production of the field of inquiry itself. In the interview, the triangulated relationship between the theorist, the interviewer (who reveals much of *her* own agenda, positionality and persona through her questions) and the reader, is conducted through an intimate mesh of desire and performance in a valued radical space. Critics stage positions as 'participants' in their areas of study and also control these stagings actively, producing entertaining and informative self-narratives of public intellectualism. Culling and choosing strategically from a number of subjectivities, demonstrating their 'freedom of choice' and etching a Gramscian critical inventory of the self, they engage in what H Aram Veeser calls "the gorgeous iconoclasm of performance" (xiii). Spivak has clearly deployed her privilege as an academic feminist and postcolonial critic, to challenge, enhance and *perform* the meaning of the term 'public intellectual' via her interviews.

As if anticipating the profligate rate at which she would be interviewed[14], and those interviews published, Spivak, in an interview with John Hutnyk, Scott McQuire and Nikos Papastergiadis in 1986, clarifies that while "speech and writing are distinguished," "published texts are transactional" in the same way as conversations are ("Strategy, Identity, Writing" *PC* 36). She talks about how a "friendly exchange" undoes "the opposition between authoritative theoretical production and the unguarded practice of conversation, enabling one to glimpse the tack of ideology" when she analyses the "Intellectuals and Power" discussion between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze in "Can the Sublatern Speak?" (272). That essay, which launched the Spivak phenomenon, also challenges the notion that contemporary critiques of the Subject are actually radical; it suggests that rather they "inaugurate a Subject" (272). Thus subject-production and identity-making are always mediated by the presence of the other. "It's a wonderful way of 'othering' oneself," Spivak contends, a process where she likes "to surrender [her]self to the interviews" (*PC* 36). Though Spivak vehemently objects to being othered by *some* of her interviewers, generally she finds the genre useful because it allows her to see her "own slips" and "teach[es] her things" not only about herself but about issues she has thought previously (*PC* 36). Speaking to Mark Wigley in 1993, she clarifies that the interview "may look like a unique kind of performance in a colloquial sense because it doesn't look like traditional writing" but that " it's not really [that]... it effects a *critique* of the limits of the individual deliberative consciousness *identified with the self*" ("Excelsior Hotel Coffee Shop" 74, emphasis mine). Spivak iterates again and again that even though "a genre... generated to bring undecidability under control" (*CPR* 186), no interview can provide the final word that can settle all unsettling textual claims. Her interviews are 'works in progress' in the real sense of the phrase, and attest to a continual thinking through, as well as critical revaluation, of her positions over time. The pivotal arguments Spivak makes in her more erudite, and often obtuse, academic work, are rendered accessible and clear in her interviews because they genuinely make use of the dialectic method to arrive at strategies. As Radhika Mohanram testifies, the "genre of the interview is truly the most productive one for Spivak, primarily because interviews self-consciously insist upon their temporality, thus permitting a fluidity and changeability of theory" (179).

Performing the Name:

> In order to become really useful these things must lose their proper names. The moment of the proper name is a transitional moment.
>
> Spivak, "Negotiating the Structures of Violence." *The Postcolonial Critic.*

Spivak inhabits the site of the interview as 'postcolonial critic' and, in the process, presents a body that is both in the service of, and in excess of, critical postcolonial theory. Let me explain and trace the path by which I arrive at this formulation. If colonial discourse was, in a final way, cemented in India in 1835 with Sir Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute on Education," then in the 'postcolonial critic' we have the putative product of that formulation, the descendant of those "native subjects" who were to belong to "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 428-430). Of course, here I exaggerate, generalise, and collapse into simplicity what is actually a wrought and complex process of historical formation that leads to such a descendant also being the agent of the empire busily talking and writing back. So well has Caliban internalised Prospero's speech that (s)he can curse back fluently in it! Spivak would of course argue that it is not Caliban who holds the power of speech as much as Ariel[15]. It is here that Ariel, Macaulay and Spivak meet for me: to form a class of "interpreters" to mediate between the governing class and the millions who are governed by the rising and burgeoning postcolonial academy[16]. In that hallowed space, the pride of place currently goes to the subject who can inhabit the space of both the metropolis and the periphery, the subject who can discourse and hold forth, with authority, on Enlightenment texts *and* offer 'embodied' critiques of its epistemological narratives, the subject who occupies the position of speech and strength by virtue of being one of the voiceless dispossessed, the subject who can move effortlessly between the position of Ariel and Caliban. The point has been made with equal and elegant force by Asha Varadarajan in *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said, and Spivak*:

> The object, product, and survivor of this necessarily incomplete process [of decolonization] is the postcolonial subject. Her "otherness" in the discourse of Western empire serves to consolidate the identity of her colonizers even as it reifies her own, and her perceived tendency to elude the categories of Western rationality renders her dear to mosaics, melting pots, and postmoderns.
>
> ("Introduction" xv)

Thus, it is a Spivak who can ask the question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and offer the answer to it at the same time, whether it be a 'no' in its original 1985 formulation, or a qualified reiteration of the same position in her 1999 revision in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*[17]. In the process, however, there is a muting of other voices that may offer enabling accounts of the dialectical relationship between postcolonial subjectivity and the Enlightenment. Spivak's injunctions to be constantly vigilant, are on the one hand, a kind of finger-wagging at any white (code for Western) theorist who might dare to make such a suggestion (though Spivak herself has always stringently argued against any kind of chromatism[18]), and on the other hand, a paralysing restraint on those 'natives' who may not begin to profess the kind of mastery she undeniably holds over the master's tools. The standard of constant reference to canonical Enlightenment texts, though essential to a nuanced understanding of the postcolonial condition (given that foundational colonial texts are the fruit of the Enlightenment), becomes the cane with which to paddle the colonial master as well as the colonised pupil. This explains the fear I allude to in the title of my essay, a fear that is enacted repeatedly in reviews of Spivak's work and in her interview situations. I myself confess to this fear, alloyed in no small measure with my tremendous respect for the trail-blazing work Spivak has done. This chapter is an attempt to grapple with that fear and come to terms with the work that demands to be, rightly, understood on its own stringently scholarly terms. It is also an attempt to pay serious attention to "a corpus that has suffered puzzling *critical* neglect in the same instant that its author garners public attention" (Varadharajan 76)[19].

In my reading of Spivak, I have also come to understand the twinned, mirroring process of deification and pariah-making of the postcolonial critic who occupies her position with such authority that she commands in equal measure, a following *and* fear. Spivak has been pivotal in re-shaping the tenets of almost all the disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and after Edward Said, is the single most cited critic in contemporary scholarship. Revered and reviled in equal measure for the acuity of her observations and for the abundance of her academic productions, Spivak is contemptuously (enviously?) dismissed by Terry Eagleton for being "reluctant to be left out of any theoretical game in town" ("In the Gaudy Supermarket")[20], and championed by David Huddart for "an immense coherence of argument" throughout her oeuvre ("Making an Example of Spivak" 36)[21]. She is celebrated, in hyperbolic terms, by Colin MacCabe as the "model product of an Indian undergraduate and an American graduate education—probably the most scholarly combination on this planet" (*In Other Worlds* ix). But Spivak is more often the "Curious Guardian at the Margin" whom "everybody knows and nobody reads" (Varadharajan 75)[22]. Her formidable scholarship makes it easy at the same time to cite her in prolific and indiscriminate manner, as also to (willfully) misread her. Given the breadth and depth of her arguments, Spivak's readers have their work cut out for them in terms of understanding her, but also have their work *done* for them because they can *rely* on her meticulous research and incisive knowledge. One of the effects of this perceived omnipotence is that Spivak becomes an excellent critic to cite—one may simply use her to illustrate a point one cannot make oneself with enough erudition or confidence. Agreeing with Spivak can simply become surrogate for professing and upholding 'morally' defensible positions in the academic world.

Apprehension and adulation come into play in Spivak's interviews too: it becomes a mark of one's scholarly achievement to be able to 'face' and interrogate her. Under the lens of Spivak's moral microscope, interlocutors and readers may feel judged harshly for not toeing the line of her particular brand of vigilance towards the "'sanctioned ignorance' of the theoretical elite and of the self-styled academic 'practitioner'" (*CPR* x). Many act out their feelings of inadequacy and political (in)correctness in a myriad of easily recognisable psychological, affective positions: identification, submission, defensiveness or aggression. Such positions become all the more acute and progressively entrenched given the contested field of identity politics in the beleaguered postcolonial academy, where "the willed (auto)biography of the West still masquerades as disinterested history, even when the critic presumes to touch its unconscious" (*CPR* 208). Spivak's method requires that one turn the spotlight not only on the world's inequities, but also on the way in which one is complicit in the production and perpetuation of them. I am not suggesting that her theoretical formulations are in themselves moralistic; instead, I think that the authority that accompanies her pronouncements renders a withering critique of anyone who does not possess or profess the same level of *informed* understanding as her. One of the crucial requisites for learning is the ability to begin at a point of ignorance and proceed step-by-step, not start with one's mind all made up. While Spivak is a great advocate of "unlearning our privilege" ("Criticism, Feminism and the Institution" 9) and "learning from below" ("Learning from Below" 6), and practises it herself in her enquiries, she is not that charitable towards some of her respondents. Moreover, her larger-than-life persona, her awe-inspiring authority and aura stand in the way of any novice making such a humble, but honest, start.

Allow me to illustrate what I mean, and dispense with the worst failing of Spivak's writing, before I move on to the truly enabling ideas, the ones which have justifiably earned her her reputation. In three of her recent interviews, all published in 2004, Spivak makes the oft-repeated point about "rethinking and revisiting and revising" the "historical lines of conflation" between continental philosophy and the project of imperialism, understood in postcolonial critique to have inaugurated colonial discourse theory ("What is Enlightenment?" 190). She contextualises this query within a global sweep of world history and geography, and makes the important point that knowledge can neither be parochial, nor can it be owned by any particular constituency, national, ethnic, religious, linguistic. However, in order to follow the circuitous logic and path of even the simplest Spivakian argument (whether in interviews or more wrought essays), a novitiate (or schooled) reader would require months of study to take in just a few pages! Followers of Spivak's work have noted that she neither spares herself nor her readers the hard task of learning, but sometimes the weight of that high intellectualising pursuit of knowledge and its (brahminical) delivery can be crippling. Talking to Tani E Barlow in "Not Really a Properly Intellectual Response," Spivak narrates her recent trip "to a place in northeastern Yunan Province" where she "gave such a huge tongue-lashing to the English teacher in the Wumang school" that he "was just shaking" (144-46). Spivak offers this as a pedagogic example of how she instructed a primary school teacher to have better faith in his students, and demand more from them, thereby encouraging him to fashion an "uncoercive rearrangement of desires" that would change the minds of pupils from not only "totally poor schools" (like his) but also highlight (for North-American readers) how much harder it is to change minds at the "much, much richer schools in the world" (in the U.S.A.) ("Not Really" 146). The broad sweep of chastisement that faults the state of education in both rural China and urban North America is necessary perhaps, but will be received differently in those constituencies, given their differential access to resources and their historical-geographical contingencies.

Another example of this mode emerges in a published conversation, with Jane Gallop, in the same year, exploring "what went wrong with the best of the Enlightenment," where Spivak offers parable after parable to illustrate "the ingredients for our historical moment" ("What is Enlightenment?" 179, 181). One of her parables is about the renowned architect Zaha Hadid, an Iraqi-Amercian architect (recently shortlisted for her entry for the redesign of the Edmonton Art Gallery), who designed the new Cincinnati museum as a "response to our time as a time of terror" (ibid 180). Spivak cites Hadid's innovative work as an example of how "extraordinary diasporics are being used to give support to the idea that the United States is going to save the world" (ibid 180)[23]. This formulation is in line with her first public articulation in the United States in 1963 in *Newsweek*, where she, along with the other interviewees, pointed out the contradictions of the function and use of the foreign students, those early diasporics in a newly postcolonial world. But forty years later, the irony of Spivak's authority and position as a fully professored, oft-invited speaker and diasporic intellectual, whether she accepts the label or not, is a penetrating and troubled one. After all, her scathing interrogative voice is being *used* to justify the self-reflexive, and supposedly free, agenda of the most powerful university system in the world[24].

The third 2004 interview, with Laura E Lyons & Cynthia Franklin, was conducted when Spivak occupied the position of Citizen's Chair at the University of Hawai'i in Manoa. There, she insists on the supremacy of the pedagogical position and questions the motivation and effect of benevolent aid activism of the kind practiced by non-governmental organisations, human rights groups and United Nations programs. ("On the Cusp of the Personal and the Impersonal" 217). It is a dubious, double-edged certificate of Spivak's all-encompassing and uncompromising pedagogic method that she expects the *same* level and standard of engagement from *all* the educators of the world—to change our modes of thinking about it—whether it be a poor rural teacher in the heartland of China, a tenured university professor in the U.S.A., or Bishop Tutu and his model of "reconciliation by testimony and confession" ("On the Cusp" 205). While I find Spivak's aims laudable and direct, her points valid and informed, it is difficult not to laugh at her egomaniac assurance that she can make all these 'teachers' see the true light. Maybe she can! The light of her scrupulous standards and her refusal to 'speak down' or condescend to *anyone* is admirable to say the least. It is not very difficult though to imagine the terrifying effect she might sometimes have on such parties, as well as those embarking on new paths of enquiry. As Ilan Kapoor puts it, Spivak's "hyper-self-reflexivity may not be paralysing; however, it tends to be inadequately layered" as it "does not distinguish between varying *degrees* of complicity" (643). Moreover, in each case, Spivak ends up being positioned as the only truly enlightened one to offer such transformative teaching! It is trying and testing to not know where her barbs will find their next mark. Her critique, while necessary, is so exacting, and demands so much scholarship, that it almost becomes a site of shifting sand from which no practitioner, academic or activist, can emerge unscathed. Her own location remains the only one stringent enough, from where she may survey and dictate the domain of 'correct' thought, and prescribe ways of "truth-telling" ("Imperialism and Sexual Difference" 226). This point has been made by many of her 'Indian' interlocutors, and I take up one such instance of 'vantage positioning' in a later section of this essay.

Inveterate Interviewee:

> I was interviewed for *Newsweek*. I am on the cover of *Newsweek*, April 1963.
>
> Spivak, "Postmarked Calcutta, India" interview with Angela Ingram.

Spivak's first interview was given when she was just 18, a newly arrived foreign (now known as international) student in the USA, trying to eke out an academic existence without any fellowships, because, she explains, she was not eligible for any, due to the fact that English was not her first language. While it is clear that Spivak's English was more than adequate, thanks to a classical colonial British education in India, this comment testifies to the still-continuing hegemony of English as a value-laden language in terms of global access and upward-mobility. And yet, she says, she was "never... afraid of intervening, speaking out, even when

[she] came here [to the USA] in '61 as a member of a foreign students [sic] group" (*PC* 84). Spivak recalls that April 1963 interview almost twenty-five years later, in a November 1987 interview with Angela Ingram, citing the *Newsweek* article in which the interview appeared: "Foreign Students: Diplomas and Diplomacy." The article spotlighted the "culture shock" of 64,000 foreign students attending American colleges, who were seen to be initiators of economic development, and projected as future ambassadors for the United States, in the countries of their origins. The cover carries a group photo of ten students, one each from Malaya, Hong Kong, India, Ghana, Colombia, Greece, Germany, Trinidad, Nigeria and Chile, all attending Cornell University. In the article, the Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs highlights the diplomatic functions of foreign students, and says, "We can teach them poetry and philosophy later" (59). That policy decision might seem misguided and naïve in this day and age when culture is taken to be the foremost ideological tool of empire, and as the United States struggles to build a positive image for itself in these very countries. It also goes contrary to the vision of Senator J William Fulbright, one of the guiding spirits behind that student exchange movement:

> The impact is on the thinking class, on the people who are going to make governments, who are going to lead. I have no illusion that all of them will get a good impression of the U.S. What really counts is that they experience our culture." (59)

Shift of empire but shades of Macaulay all over again, accompanied by an utterly misplaced sense of the superiority of American culture, and contradicted by many of the students' comments in the article.

After commenting on the many curious experiences associated with foreign students, including "one weird winter sight: ski pants under saris," Mel Elfin and Constance R Montague, the writers of the article, conclude that the foreign student program in the U.S. "tells us a good deal about ourselves as a nation and as a people" (61, 60). Comments by two of the interviewees in that article certainly offer a barometer of popular public opinion in the USA (then, as now). Nancy Chu from Hong Kong is reported to have said: "American abstract expressionists have greatly influenced my painting. Oriental art now has less meaning. I prefer the up-to-date" (60). In the next issue, of 16th May, she writes in a rejoinder:

> I am afraid that my delight at being included in your article has been strongly overshadowed by the fact that you misquoted me. I did not say "Oriental art now has less meaning. I prefer the up-to-date." Perhaps the misunderstanding arose when I was asked why I painted in the Western manner while in the United States, and I replied that I had come here to do so; if I had wished to study only Oriental art, I would have stayed in Hong Kong. It is a very personal choice of expressing oneself in an art form; not to be misinterpreted as an evaluation of different cultures of the world. As a matter of fact, different cultures have their own wholesome meanings in the art expressed. (*Newsweek* 6)

Her words on cultural relativism are mild compared to Spivak's, who was then Gayatri Chakravorty, and who appeared sari-clad on the cover and in a shalwar-kameez inside the magazine, asking peremptorily: "Why must Americans smile at people they haven't met? Still I like my fellow students. *We have our common traumas*" (61 emphasis mine). The last word is a very significant one, given that trauma theory was yet to make a mark on academic or theoretical space, and given that it had not yet been used in any sustained way in theories of economic and educational migration. Spivak repeats the word in the Ingram interview differently ("I've been traumatized"), explaining that she had "absolutely no compunction in producing this deathless line" for which she got "hate mail like you wouldn't believe" (*PC* 84). She explicates further:

> I now know that this was an astute thing to say. I was a luscious nineteen-year-old, and they smiled at me because, to an extent, they didn't really think. It's like women in *National Geographic* where they are allowed to have bare breasts. I was not someone with whom they had the same rules, the same sexual code of behaviour. (*PC* 84-85)

The remark is astute because the *Newsweek* article spends considerable time detailing the sexual difficulties of 'foreign [black] men' in the USA, but goes on to say that for "the non-African foreign student, dating does not present as much of a problem, particularly for such lovely girls as India's Gayatri Chakravorty, a 21-year old doctoral candidate in English, and Hong Kong's Nancy Chu, 22, an art student who is as Americanized as frozen chow mein" (66). It is surely here, in this article, with all its contradictions and nuance, that the germs of the ideas for Spivak's early feminist articles from the 1980's, of the intersection between sex, gender, identity, origins and speech, take shape: "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (delivered as a lecture in 1983, though published later to much acclaim only in 1988), "Love Me, Love My Ombre, Elle" (where she discusses "woman... as a name for citationality 22), "The Imperialism of Representation/The Representation of Imperialism" (where she declares as "spurious" the "stringent binary opposition between positivism/essentialism" 120) and "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" (where she points out the dangers of "not acknowledging the connections" between "imperialist disciplinary practice" and "feminism" 225-26).

As must be evident by now, I take up the 1963 interview in such detail because it places in context and carries in it the seeds of almost all of Spivak's subsequent work on identity and essentialism. The *Newsweek* interview was conducted at a time when the U.S.A. was grappling with the ideological tensions between the East and the West, the former representing Communism and the latter Capitalism, and trying to siphon off most of the brain-drain from developed and developing nations for the fear of losing them to the Eastern bloc. The mixed motivation of the student exchange program thus enacts its price upon the usual suspects—the foreigners and alien residents—whose much-needed presence is nevertheless continually challenged and looked upon with suspicion in the capitalist, multicultural nation. The trauma incurred by these bodies is in their refusal to be pigeon-holed into *an* idea of a racialised/ethnicised/otherised entity, while, at the same time, in their effort to occupy the embodied self as a gendered intellectual. Their hyper-racialisation is matched by hypo-genderisation. In any event, essentialist categorisation imposed by the nation upon its outsiders is matched by its internalisation in the target audience, along with the realization of the impossibility of transcending such essentialism. What is interesting is that at the moment when Spivak fixates upon 'unthinking' Americans, she also labels herself for her politics of "moral outrage" by saying "Brahmin women have always been outspoken" (*PC* 85). This is a politics of self-naming that Spivak does not flinch from, indeed follows year after year, decade after decade, as she carves out for herself the role of the postcolonial critic. She makes it clear moreover, time and again, that when she poses the question of whether marginalised groups can speak or not, she herself is not speaking *as* a subaltern, nor is she speaking *for* one. Clarifying how she has been consistently misunderstood, Spivak remarks in a 1996 interview titled "Subaltern Talk" with Landry and Maclean:

> I think people also go wrong, and this is very much a United States phenomenon, in thinking that we have any interest in preserving subalternity. There is for us no feeling of romantic attachment to pure subalternity as such. And I was not, in fact, [in "Can the Subaltern Speak?] choosing a distinctly subaltern person. This woman [Bhubaneswari Debi] was middle-class. Thus I implied that, in the case of the woman, the idea of subalternity, because of woman's limited permission to narrate, becomes contaminated. (289)

In Nancy Chu's case, the HongKong student from Spivak's cohort at Columbia University, the contamination occurs due to her being a foreign body, and her narration is compromised because she is 'Orientalised' as an artist.

The politics of nomenclature in the postcolonial Anglo-American academy explains why the interview ("like the conference") is a "site of betrayal" (*CPR* 249) for Spivak; she cannot be just any anonymous theorist or unmarked critic in that situation. She occupies space and time at the moment of the interview, she is a *part* of history and *making* history at the same time there; she is there as a body, gendered and raced, first and foremost, but also not only. She admits she makes again and again, deliberately, the "disciplinary mistake: [of] telling life stories in the name of history" (*CPR* 249). This strategy is a necessary occupational hazard for the postcolonial body and marks the difference between an interview and an essay for the persistent critic who uses the ruse of essentialism to narrate history. Spivak returns obsessively to naming in order to diagnose the condition of postcoloniality that attends third world intellectuals in diaspora, and to "continue to place the South (no longer only 'the Third World') in the history of its own present, instead of treating it as a locus of nostalgia and/or human interest" ("Lives" 213). The emphasis on nomenclatural positioning and experiential power is something that Maria Koundoura intuits early in an interview titled "Naming Gayatri Spivak" (1989), where Spivak speaks about what is now a life-long concern for her—the shifting grounds of naming or labelling:

> ... my work would not be an undermining of names but an acknowledgement of the vulnerability, that there *is* nothing but naming.... As a caste Hindu Indian, speaking to a London audience maybe 50, certainly 70 years ago, the name that would allow me to have a common ground was *Aryan*. Today the name that allows me to have a common ground is *marginal*. To an extent, the center decides to give you a piece of centrality: either a central name like Aryan or a marginal name like marginal, and you actually welcome it in order to speak.... I think that the historicizing of the inevitable production of names is a much more productive enterprise than a counter-name-calling.
>
> (85-86, underscoring mine, italics Spivak's)

Thus, in order to engage ethically in the project of historicisation, while accepting the salience of proper and informed naming, Spivak consistently argues against *merely* succumbing to the demand for marginality made upon postcolonial bodies. Unless accompanied by critique and circumspection, naming becomes only "essentialism by default" ("In a Word" interview with Ellen Rooney. *Outside* 15). Spivak confesses to being "tired of dining out on being an exile" and assures the *Melbourne Journal of Politics* in 1986 that she is "never defined as a marginal in India" (*PC* 40-41)[25]. In India, whatever she does, she is "recognizable, marked, socially as, you know, 'up there'" ("Postmarked Calcutta" *PC* 83). She reiterates that "in terms of the hegemonic historical narrative, certain peoples have always been asked to cathect the margins so others can be defined as central;" therefore sometimes they have to see themselves as "the marginal in the eyes of others" (*PC* 40-41). In such a situation, she insists repeatedly, "the only strategic thing to do is to absolutely present oneself at the centre [when] asked to be marginal" ("Strategy, Identity, Writing" *PC* 41). "In a Word" then, "the idea of a *strategy*" can never be forgotten in questions of naming and claiming essence (*Outside* 5).

Strategising Essentialism:

> Since one cannot not be an essentialist, why not look at the ways in which one is an essentialist, carve out a representative essentialist position, and then do politics according to the old rules whilst remembering the dangers in this?
>
> Spivak "Strategy, Identity, Writing." *The Postcolonial Critic.*

> It is not possible within discourse, to escape essentializing somewhere. The moment of essentialism or essentialisation is irreducible.
>
> Spivak "The Problem of Cultural Self-representation." *The Postcolonial Critic.*

Spivak's narration of her first ever interview in 1963 to Angela Ingram twenty-five years later is a very interesting moment of reception and retrospection. She takes us back to that particular moment when she was made to be/stood in the position of an 'other' within American media, that of the foreign student, and marks it as an originary point of enquiry into her own identity-formation as an American observer and scholar. The Ingram interview, "Postmarked Calcutta, India," is also critically positioned in Spivak's career as an interviewee subject who straddles two locations across two continents, two cultures, two sensibilities. It takes place in Calcutta in 1987, the place and home of her origin, and follows on the heels of an earlier interview, "The Postcolonial Critic," with three Indian academics from New Delhi—Rashmi Bhatnagar, Lola Chatterjee and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan—where Spivak had been subjected to a gruelling interrogation on the role of the postcolonial critic. At the time of the New Delhi interview, obtained before she went to Calcutta, Spivak held a visiting professorship at the Centre of Historical Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University; the interview was published by a prominent New Delhi based journal, *The Book Review*, that same year. Both these interviews take place during a visit that is the first time Spivak is able to 'go back home' in an academic capacity, after twenty -five years spent as a scholar in the West, where she has already made a mark as a postcolonial critic. This is the first time she holds an actual bank account in India, and is subject to specific Indian laws and citizenship regulations. The Ingram interview takes note of its location in its title and places the postcolonial critic as someone outside the nation—someone who is able to say, "India is not a place. It's really a sort of political construct" (*PC* 87). It is thus titled "Postmarked Calcutta, India" in the manner of missives from home that exilic writers are wont to talk about when they inhabit a diasporic imaginary.

"Postmarked Calcutta, India" *has to be read* against "The Postcolonial Critic" from which Harasym's collection takes its title, where Spivak's position as a postcolonial critic is challenged the most, proving her own contention that the postcolonial position is always contingent and provisional. Spivak declares that her interview with Ingram is precisely the kind of "old one-on-one" (*PC* 81) that she desires with women who are out of the circuit of feminism in India, a fallout of "The Postcolonial Critic" interview where she experiences first hand the strain and contestations of "Cultural Studies and Third World Feminism stakeouts" in elite Indian universities ("Lives" 212). Spivak does not want to "produce any testimony literature, or oral histories, or witnessings from these women" (*PC* 81) who interview her. Nevertheless, a critical story of two postcolonialities is being created in the two interviews, offering two kinds of witnessing and oral histories of the postcolonial critic, one (with)in the nation and one (with)out it. Both interviews are exercises in strategically positioning herself, on the one hand, as a legitimately nationed body, and on the other, as an extra-national one, whose claim to the 'original' nation is precisely the stronger because it is diasporic[26]. In "The Postcolonial Critic," Spivak makes the distinction that "an exile is someone who is obliged to stay away—I am not in that sense an exile" (*PC* 68), and again in "Postmarked Calcutta, India," she declares herself "an unpatriotic citizen of India" (*PC* 75), but a citizen nevertheless (the only way perhaps to *be* one).

In "Strategy, Identity, Writing," an interview conducted the year before in Canberra, with John Hutnyk, Scott McQuire and Nikos Papastergiadis, Spivak contends that she finds her power "very much less in an interview situation, than in the classroom or when [she is] writing" because even though "the one who answers has the power," there is "a certain kind of nervousness on the part of the person answering" (*PC* 35). This nervousness is certainly very apparent in the interview with the New Delhi academics. "Objects of knowledge should not have national names," she says in the Canberra interview, and yet with the intellectuals in India, Spivak clamours for a kind of identification that has to take into account national borders and belonging. Hotfooting around essentialism comes into play, nay performance, when Spivak is taken to task by the three New Delhi critics for constituting them as "native intellectuals" and herself, to her advantage, as "the non-resident Indian (NRI) who comes back to India, however temporarily, upon the wings of progress," and makes moral pronouncements with a complete "lack of consequences" (*PC* 67, 68). Spivak answers that she constitutes them "equally with the diasporic Indian, as a post-colonial intellectual!" (*PC* 67) but she is unable to convince them of a similitude of views. In the Canberra interview, she had argued that there is no way one cannot "not speak from a place" (*PC* 46), but in Calcutta, her Indian peers are insistent that they do not share enough common ground. Spivak is caught in a desperate moment of strategising to stay afloat in a face-off with those who she imagines share the dream of a common postcolonial and political language[27], while they are equally clear that the grounds on which such a language can be mediated are irreparably fraught within the context of global academic politics and knowledge production.

The nuance of this hotfooting moment is caught uniquely by Radhika Mohanram and Sangeeta Ray, both postcolonial feminist critics who feel curiously and compellingly interpellated by the call of the nationed as well as the diasporic gendered body. Mohanram, in "The postcolonial critic: Third World (con)texts/First World contexts," her conclusion to *Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space*, points out that instead of "being a commemoration of Spivak's triumphant homecoming... the interview is fraught with tension and undercurrents of discord between her and the three Indian professors" (178). Ray explains in "The Postcolonial Critic: Shifting Subjects, Changing Paradigms" that postcolonial critics after Spivak feel compelled to respond to the interview as their own "autobiographical preamble" to constitute and contextualise themselves, to address "the internal imbalance produced in the narrative voice that seeks to present itself even as it challenges the metaphysical impossibility of the representation of identity in and as presence" (209). Spivak, as if anticipating all these charges chooses to skirt the question in the interview by saying that "no one can articulate the space she herself inhabits" and that it is "something that one really learns from other people" (*PC* 68). This is a very important caveat to the naming of identity and brings into relief the tensions between name-calling and self-identification, whether they are based on essentialist or constructivist ideas of origin. Unable to "separate out the time movement in spacing" (Wigley 74) in her interactions with Bhatnagar, Chatterjee and Sunder Rajan, Spivak refuses to admit, exasperatingly, that the three Delhi

University lecturers inhabit any space different from her. Since space is also differentiated by time, the very idea of time zones is indicative of the variance of space they inhabit, or even in, especially in, a globalised world. The idea of Spivak being able to occupy, simultaneously, easily, the position of the postcolonial critic (whose identity depends on her location in the West) and the third world intellectual (who is located in a different world so to speak), is a self- invested, if understandable, elision of time and space.

Two years after the New Delhi interview, Spivak seems to have learnt a useful lesson from the experience and is much more careful when she says to Ellen Rooney in "In a Word," that even though "strategies are taught as if they were theories, good for all cases," one has to be "careful to see that they do not misfire for people who do not resemble us and do not share the situation of prominent U.S. universities and colleges" (*Outside* 4). Rooney begins their talk in 1988 with an acknowledgement that in recent discussions of essentialism, there had been "a new willingness to take the 'risk of essentialism'" (3). Spivak's rejoinder is that "feminism's return to the problem of essentialism" is a "dream of a common language" where "political difference is reduced to a matter of bad form" (2). She contends that the "strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword like *woman* or *worker* or the name of a nation is, ideally, self-conscious for all mobilized" (3). But when used prescriptively, or as a lasting strategy, it becomes an impossible risk. It is when Spivak says to Rooney that "one has to look at where the group... is situated when one makes claims for or against essentialism" (*Outside* 4) that we realise how much she was caught up in the insider's "accident of birth" affinity with her Indian compatriots (*CPR* 267) in the *affective* moment of being questioned by them. At that earlier moment, she found it difficult to occupy anything but the *imagined community with them of the nation*; she found it impossible to be the one looking *in* on them. Thus five years after she had launched (in 1984) what became the compulsory byword and necessary slogan of all identity politics, Spivak admits to Rooney that she has *reconsidered* her "cry for a strategic use of essentialism" because in "a personalist culture... it's the idea of a *strategy* that has been forgotten" (*Outside* 5). In 1984, she had claimed to Elizabeth Grosz that "we have to choose again strategically, not universal discourse, but essentialist discourse" ("Criticism, Feminism, and The Institution *PC* 11) but she acknowledges to Rooney in 1989 that a "strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory" ("In a Word" *Outside* 4).

It is pertinent to note that Spivak *inaugurates* the most influential aspect of her work in two interviews, two situations in which she had to acknowledge the strategy of responding to the time and space she occupied, as well as pay heed to the affective demands of the task. Spivak coined the term "strategic essentialism" in the 1984 interview with Grosz, "Criticism, Feminism, and The Institution," a term that has subsequently come to be synonymous with Spivak's name, fame and reputation, as one of the most cited concepts in contemporary theories of identity, be it feminism, postcolonialism or cultural studies (*PC* 184). A decade later, Spivak herself acknowledges this debt to the catalytic and interventionist function of an interview in the "Foreword" to *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (referred to as *Outside* above and hereafter). She says: "Indeed I was not aware of my strategic use of essentialism. I knew it in response to Elizabeth Grosz, a woman who cared enough to interview me" (*Outside* ix). The 'eureka' moment of coining the term is almost as important, for me, as the *affect* associated with the coinage: that of caring. Spivak exposes "in a word" (*Outside* 1) how the face-to-face encounter of an interview can be productive of radical responsibility and mutuality on the part of the "academic/intellectual/artistic hybrid" (*Outside* x). This is precisely because the inter-action between two personalities, the face-to-face coming together of two *identities*, two *affects*, is what Gloria Anzaldúa would call *haciendo caras*, the "making face, making soul" of identity politics (from the cover/title of Anzaldúa's 1990 collection of *Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Colour*). When the time comes for Spivak to revise and update the concept in the wake of the "explosion of marginality studies in college and university teaching in the United States," it is in an interview again, in 1993, with Rooney, that forces the shift in her work "from a 'strategic use of essentialism' to considerations of institutional agency that accompanied the explosion" (*Outside* ix). Ever vigilant in her "work against the misappropriations and misreadings of 'strategic essentialism'," Spivak clarifies again in an interview with Lyons and Franklin in 2004, her position on the "strategic exclusions" that mark group identity and "metropolitan domination" ("On the Cusp" 219, 209).

Violence and Violation: A Transformative Practice?

> Time becomes violent in the space of the interview.... Time becomes violent in displacements. "Excelsior Hotel Coffee Shop." Interview with Mark Wigley.

In their "Introduction" to *The Spivak Reader*, editors Landry & MacLean declare that "Spivak has relentlessly challenged the high ground of established philosophical discourse" by using "difficult theoretical language" (2), implying that she has used the master's tools to challenge the foundations of the master's house[28]. The interviews "reject [such] polarities" (Veeser xiii) between high and low theory, and offer instead, as Spivak says, "temporalizing accounts of a life... not as the unique and incontrovertible accounting of a truth, but as factitious responses to what is (or is not) perceived as a challenge precisely for such an account, accounting, accountability)" ("Lives" 205). The interviews interrupt normalized modes of literary reading and move beyond the academic word on the page to the realm of the wider world where assumptions of accountability haunt the living body of the critic. According to Veeser, such self-identifying and self-realising accounts of critical lives "replace a process with an erotics" (xiii). In the realm of the interview, we are fully and inescapably, face-to-face with the body and the person(a) that the critic wishes to show us, with her attendant agenda. This erotic and 'desirous' aspect of the interview form is crucial to my affective understanding of Spivak as the postcolonial critic. Spivak's interviews represent an almost Conradian "abomination" of and simultaneous "fascination" with (31) the Other that haunts the presence of the postcolonial critic in the contemporary academy. We must remember Joseph Conrad's superb Congolese woman in *Heart of Darkness*, "a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman" who in all her "barbarous ornaments" and brassed glory can only be body and not speech (100). When she *is* allowed speech, she can only be an unintelligible spectacle, "like a fury" (Conrad 101), for the uncomprehending and horrified, yet fascinated, white audience. A desire to shatter this "formidable silence" could be a possible reason for Spivak's prolific output in the publishing canon (ibid.). Since the non-white theorist is not speaking in the 'familiar' language of and within the institution, even though schooled in its tenets, she is often relegated to being just the 'body' that intrudes upon its "imperialist project cathected as civil-society-through-social-mission" (*CPR* 116). Her text and her speech is a matter of contention and re-articulates the problem of inclusion within liberal democratic spaces. All the words she may utter are reducible to nothing but an angry babble for those who choose to render her purpose "inscrutable" (Conrad 101). This last problem of incomprehension of the Other critic is not limited only to Spivak, but determines how many theorists 'of colour' are characterized[29].

Spivak's use of the interview to provide an invaluable gloss to her often obtuse and obdurate, seemingly measured and considered theoretical prose is itself an important strategic method. The interviews make palpable the affective modality of postcolonial criticism, and indeed of any identity-based critique. This method of supplementarity[30] has itself come under much criticism, viz. Mike Hill at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the Modern Languages Association:

> Autocritographers are playing the Romantic poet, recollecting in tranquility a moment of ungoverned excess (the moment of Theory).
>
> qtd. Veeser xi

But in many exchanges with her interlocutors, Spivak's language continues to be as dense and "incomprehensible" (Conrad 31) as her prose pieces, declaring the unapologetic presence of the identities she has come to occupy—"a difficult woman" and "a difficult native" (*In Other Worlds* ix, referred to hereafter as *IOW*). These identities stand in as surrogate for many other third-world, othered and postcolonial bodies in contemporary Anglo-American theory. The adjective 'difficult' becomes code for, and is a concretisation of, the difficulty entailed in building bridges between oppositional standpoint theories[31] and dominant hegemonic positions. In Spivak's own words, the interview is an "enabling violation" that allows the interviewee subject to produce a narrative of the self through "the trope of transforming encounter with the other" (ctd. Bryne 20). I am indebted here to the interview work of Avtar Brah who speaks of the moment of the interview as one which completely obliterates, as well as provides objective authority to, the investigating subject in "face-to-face" encounters between antagonistic white residents and embodied interviewer (herself), in racially-charged Southhall neighbourhoods. I take Brah's point that the moment of interpellation in the interview is one which "relationally" links interviewer and interviewee, so that they both "understood who the 'they' in [their] conversation was" (273-74). Interviews then can be seen as sites marking 'us' and 'them' and I take Spivak's interviews as delineating that space between 'us' and 'them' that postcolonial work brings to the fore in terms of contemporary cultural politics. They offer fascinating insight into the way in which postcolonial encounters of the embodied kind constantly dance around issues of representation, and merge "the means of representation" with "the representation itself" (Varadharajan 77). Brah further points out that at the instance of "the face-to-face presence during interview," the postcolonial body is both "obliterated" and made the repository of "objectivity" (273-74). This formulation is pivotal to my contention that the postcolonial critic is both sublimated and made concrete at the moment of her instantiation into the corporeal contact zone of embodiment. The idea of perfomative essentialism is central to her identity politics.

The embodied nature of the interaction between two interlocuting 'bodies' brings to fore the prime issues around exclusion and belonging, racialisation and essentialism that are central to postcolonial and post-second-wave feminist theory. The interviews thereby provide the frame in which the postcolonial critic hotfoots between her 'disembodied' work and her all-too present identity. They bring to the fore the persona of the public intellectual who *narrates* her times through her life, acting as a barometer of social chronology and historical discourse. Within the volatile site of the interview, the interlocutors are bound in a dynamics of responsibility and mutuality, both physical and psychic, that Mary Zournazi calls a "creative practice that opens up the possibilities of writing and hearing differently" (7). Interviewer and interviewee bring their own affiliations, backgrounds and contexts to bear upon the issue in question, thereby "coming together" in "an otherness" that provides "an ethics" for "working together to transform what we know" (Zournazi 7). The time-bound space has a topicality, a temporality, that makes the interview form a mode of locating as well as limiting contemporaneous times. The space and time become uniquely designed for question and answer, interrogation and response, emergency and contingency. Even in the tightly controlled space of the after-interview edit, the response of the interviewee is not simply one of arbitrary theorising or free-floating suggestion, but a response that arises out of the particular situation of the interview, in the specific nature of the *exchange* between two subjects and subject positions. In Spivak's own words:

> We all know that when we engage profoundly with one person, the responses—the answers—come from both sides. Let us call this responsibility. And "answer"ability or accountability.
>
> "Cultural Talks in the Hot Peace: Revisiting the 'Global Village'" 340.

The theoretical acumen of the postcolonial critic is evoked repeatedly within an institutional space that wants to reinvent itself; however, the embodied presence of the critic is challenged by the exigencies of the institution as well as larger discourses of the multicultural nation. In the game of cultural relativism, dominant majority power is aggregated at the expense of minority currency. In her interviews, Spivak occupies and 'comes to sit' in this volatile and contested space that brings to the surface immediately the flesh-and-blood inhabitation of her postcolonial status. Her theorisations gather force not only by virtue of her examinations of the imperial project and her unerring grasp of its underpinning ideologies, but also because she *is* the historical object of imperialism's narrative. The experience of being a particularly marked and racialised body within feminist and postcolonial identitarian movements becomes poignantly pronounced in her interviews, even as she walks the razor's edge between being a privileged literary critic and theorist on the one hand, and an essentialised and gendered body from the global South, on the other. Spivak has tried to put paid to the contradiction by continually insisting on being a teacher, indeed complaining that she is "at the mercy of this role...

because it is a position without identity, because it is defined in terms of class" ("On the Cusp" 217). In the space of the interview, what gets foregrounded again and again, despite her best efforts, is the contingent nature of this supposedly 'identityless' space. But even a Spivak cannot theorise herself as being *Outside* in *the Teaching Machine* without facing up to the fact that holding the keys to postcolonial knowledge within institutionally sanctioned spaces is a privileged location, one with the weight of an entire history that created it in the first place.

Spivak's interviews bring to the surface the subterranean core of embodiment and corporeality that underlie the involved and intricate categories of difference and identity, authenticity and appropriation, hyphenation and hybridity, that accompany the presence of postcolonial bodies in the West. Like lost baggage that arrives late, or not at all, these categories accompany and negotiate diasporic conditions; but because they are constantly mobile and mutable, it is impossible to pin *the postcolonial critic* down to one consolidated identity, as becomes clear in the course of the myriad interviews that Spivak has given. On the one hand, the definitive and defining aspect of being a racialised body in a white settler nation is made opaque in mere disembodied 'theory' that can shift and skirmish, fit and fix, stretch and compress, and generally play putty with issues of racialisation. On the other hand, the postcolonial critic constantly mediates between insider and outsider status with respect to her point and nation of origin. The raison d'être of her location within the Anglo-Western/Northern postcolonial academy, with its easy access to a global publishing regime, also marks her as an outsider in the nation of her origin, the 'less-privileged' nation which nevertheless supplies her with much of the cultural material and theoretical momentum to justify her 'postcoloniality.' At the same time, she is the prodigal daughter who will be claimed by the mother country whenever she wins accolades in the adopted one. Thus questions about the relevance of origins and the nation refuse to die, and cosmopolitan mobility and globe-trotting theory cannot be contained within the confines of the loose interview. They spill out repeatedly in what can only be called an extended soap opera that spans forty years and four continents in the life of the postcolonial critic. This untidiness, uncontainability and looseness of format is also what Spivak consciously and constantly mimics in the self-referential, citational and footnoting style of her more theoretical, consolidated work in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

Psychobiography of the Postcolonial Critic:

> In 1965, I became an Assistant Professor at the University of Iowa. I was twenty-three, the only Asian of any kind in the entire faculty, one of two women.... In 1983, I had been appointed Longstreet Professor of English at Emory University, the first female chairholder of color there.... I went on to become the first woman of any color to hold a Mellon Professorship at Pittsburg (1987).
>
> I was brought up as a middle-class polytheist. Who knew then that this would be theorized as the ingredients for staging an origin in 1981?
>
> Spivak, "Lives." *Confessions of the Critics.*

> Imperialism cannot be justified by the fact that India has railways and I speak English well.
>
> Spivak "Cultural Talks in the Hot Peace: Revisiting the 'Global Village'"

This chapter has not been just a theoretical treatise on Spivakian formulations. It is also a creative exercise in making sense of what brings about the spectacular success of a *figure* like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in the Anglo-American academy. Spivak's interviews offer a "psychobiography"[32] (*CPR* 109) of the postcolonial critic who *arrives* on the Anglo-American academic scene circa the 1980s and makes it 'the home and the world' of postcolonial representation. *The Home and the World* (1915) is the title of Rabindranath Tagore's novel that fictionalises the nineteenth-century imperial encounter between east and west, nationalism and religio-racial affiliations, in colonial India, through the figure of the good wife and woman who strays from her path. Spivak continues the legacy of the errant woman (scholar)[33] who strays from the path of 'good' literary criticism to question the very parametres of colonial knowledge and subject formation. Traditional literary criticism, the field where Spivak started her career, demands that works of fiction be taken up and analysed with reference to context, generic, biographical and social, with the help of critics who have devoted themselves to the task. Spivak veers away from this well-trod road when she brings an alternate body of knowledge in the form of translations from Bangla, her mother-tongue, into the English canon, and questions the processes by which colonial structures of knowledge acquire power and legitimacy. She intervenes in the crucial debates of the day not only through textual literary criticism and abstract high theory, but by inserting an animate body, her body and persona, very powerfully into her narratives.

Spivak's lineage can be traced to the "first generation of Indian intellectuals after independence" who, she claims, offer a more interesting perspective than that of Midnight's Children, who were "born free by chronological accident" ("Bonding in Difference" 274). This lineage is claimed by many other theorists, mainly postcolonial feminists, who share some traits with her background, and who have earned their stripes and made their reputations in a postcolonial academy. The comprehensive appendix of interviews and articles at the end of this chapter follows Spivak from her early days in the West (which becomes the global North in her lifetime), in the America of the Civil Rights movements (1960's), witnesses her leap into fame through the translation of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976) and entry into academic authority via deconstruction (which becomes fashionable in the Anglo-American academy subsequent to her translation), journeys with her in Anglo-American feminism, the trajectories of which she helps reshape through her essays on imperialism and sexual difference (1981), makes note of foundational assertions of strategic essentialism (1984) and the subaltern (1988), and finally celebrates her moment of absolute *arrival* through Sarah Harasym's book of interviews which confers on her the definitive label of *the postcolonial critic.* Each of these moments is instantiated in interviews that construct different "Gayatri Spivaks who 'represent' various historical and geographical cases" ("Lives" 205). Each one is based on the thesis that "experience is a staging of experience," a point

Spivak makes, following Joan Scott (who used Spivak's formulations on experience)[34], in her most 'explicitly' autobiographical piece titled "Lives" in *Confessions of the Critics* (205-06). As Landry and Maclean would have it, "Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is also this collection of texts" (*SR* 2).

Spivak's contiguous Return[35] to India to work in aboriginal communities in a modern, democratic, increasingly capitalist and fundamentalist nation-state, can be framed within the context of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason (CPR)*, which is a tortuous and deliberate *re*-reiteration of all the theoretical points she has made over the past four decades. Spivak explains in *CPR* that she finds that in the process of revising her essays, she returns far more frequently to issues she thought she had worked out in the past, a methodology that surfaces repeatedly in the interviews. Many critics have dismissed *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* as a rehashed, warmed-over version of Spivak's previous writings, but for me, these reiterations mark an essential trope of her postcolonial critique, making it *An Unfashionable Grammatology*, the title she had initially intended for her iterative magnum opus, as opposed to the wildly successful and fashionable translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. These repetitions are crucial because academics, like the worlds they inhabit, suffer from selective amnesia and need to be reminded of the relationality of colonial structures of power that perpetuate and replicate themselves over and over again[36]. Spivak's interviews too emphasise these repetitive methods as necessary to combat new defenses and the insidious propagation of imperial and neocolonial epistemologies, and repeatedly underscore and re-explain the points in order to remove any confusions.

Spivak acknowledges her citational complicity in what Sangeeta Ray calls "the consolidation of a species of the 'Postcolonial Critic'" by assuming again and again "her [own] authoritative subject position" (210, 211). Questioned on this stylistic strategy by the *Melbourne Journal of Politics* in 1987, she explains that she is "still learning and unlearning so much" that the earlier things she has written become "interpretable" to her in new ways (*PC* 38). Repeating herself in that way keeps her aware that "one is always on the move, always citational in one way or another. If you like, in the narrow sense, it is to mark the place of one's own citationality" (*PC* 38). The power over citationality is of paramount importance to the postcolonial critic who incessantly travels between multiple homes and worlds, and is constantly subject to institutional efforts to diagnose her. She must constantly hotfoot from one disciplinary home to another as native informant, generic third worlder, area studies specialist, affirmative action quota filler, de facto body of colour etc. She must also use each of these essentialist, vantage positions to provide "a wonderful antidote" to (neo)colonial forms of knowledge control (*PC* 38). Spivak sees herself "as a vehicle citing an earlier history" in "this entire itinerary of this learning and unlearning process" (PC 38), whereby "every attempt to communicate is haunted by a sobering awareness of the commodification to which knowledge is subject" (Varadharajan 77). Allowing "a violent interview to take place, unprepared, improvised, like the rush of examinations and evaluations, is appropriate" for her, "even, though especially, if it does not transcribe well" ("Excelsior Hotel Coffee Shop" 74).

Spivak's psychobiography is the story of repetitions, a method common to, and characteristic of, oral-traditional and revisionist-history narratives. The strategy of presenting a repetitive autobiography of oneself is now recognized as a specifically feminist method and process of "decolonizing the subject" (the title of a 1992 anthology edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson that explores the politics of gender in women's autobiography). Memoirs and testimonials are crucial to this project of decolonising the subject, because they operate within a juridical space, "a jurisdiction, or forum of judgement" where both "the text itself and the public sphere it enters can be understood as jurisdictions" (Gilmore 695-96). As Leigh Gilmore explains, jurisdictions are "forms and representations of legitimacy that confer status and identity on persons and acts" (697). Spivak's narratival method in the interviews creates a juridical *case-study* symptomatic of other postcolonial critics like her. Her contributions to feminist, cultural and diasporic debates in a corporate, neo-liberal institution offer a historically informed and institutionally nuanced understanding of the much-maligned category of 'identity' and legitimize essentialism as an invaluable and necessary tool to understand the contemporary world. Speaking 'off the cuff' is always conditioned, for Spivak, by "a whole variety of psycho-social, ethno-economic, historical and ideological strands—all those modes of differentiation which are more or less violent in their necessary constitutive exclusions" ("Strategy Identity, Writing" *PC* 36).

In all her writing, Spivak employs a self-referential frame that traces her various paths to 'a' place of origin, a device that is symptomatic of contemporary postcoloniality's autobiographical account of itself.

Indeed, Veeser argues that autobiography and subjective interpretation have come to occupy a legitimate place in all contemporary academic theory, working on the "hypothesis of liberal authenticity" and its "corollary—native identity politics" (x). He goes on to say:

> Nowadays autobiographical criticism has come into general use. Granted, the autobiographical segment may occupy no more than forty seconds of a forty-minute talk. But the audience will ask questions only about the forty seconds. Autobiography triggers their startle reflex. (x)

Spivak as *the* postcolonial critic can be read as a case study in unravelling the "postcolonial paradigm" that Terry Goldie presents as a conundrum (Goldie 311), that Meena Alexander terms "autovoyeurism" (Bahri & Vasudeva 36) and that Leela Gandhi objects to as the presenting of "cultural inheritance as knowledge" (Gandhi ix). She is the *text* that explains the logic of postcolonialism within the multicultural academy. Goldie suggested, only half in jest, at a 2000 conference, that "the postcolonial is a South Asian migrant looking at herself" and "the rest of us [postcolonial critics] are pretending to be South Asian migrants looking at ourselves" (Chakraborty 136, Goldie 310). Spivak's composition in terms of class and caste origins in colonial India, the resultant cultural capital she accumulates within the Indian/Bengali hierarchy of intellectualism, the diasporic journey she makes as an exchange student in the US in the 1960s, her current Non-Resident Indian status in India versus her Resident Alien status in the U.S.A., all of which are pieces of the same congruent story that impact upon her theorisations in the now global North and South. Her interviews feature as a sort of *curriculum vitae* of her life as a literary critic, a postcolonial feminist and a 'representative' third world academic situating herself in the multicultural white settler nation (Bryne 27). The "'Gestalt' of the narrative" (Bryne 3) in these interviews, fits the definition of Foucault's notion of "specific intellectuals" who operate "within specific sectors, at the pressure points where their own conditions of life and work situate them" (ctd. by Jones 159).

Rehearsing and Repeating Conclusions:

> Spivak's excessive self-referencing suggests... a claim to authority... While simpler considerations of vanity or convenience might also be at work, the politics of the gesture should not be overlooked.
>
> Kathy E Ferguson . ctd. by Spivak in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* 201.

Spivak not only spells out a diagnostic for our times but also a prophecy and augury for a future that can make sense only if we pay very close attention to our past, to where we come from, and to *how we narrate* our present, i.e. if and when we take into cognizance all the contextual information surrounding any standpoint or worldview. Michiel Baud and Rosanne Rutten, in their study of popular intellectuals, deem this process of "conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves" essential to "any political movement against oppression" (1). This method, which they call 'framing,' is common to postcolonial intellectuals who are products of particular "historical dynamics" of "colonial domination, cultural contact and political confrontation" and defines their "collective identities, which demarcate the objectives and lines of contention" (Baud & Rutten 11, 1). Citing Edward Shils' seminal essay, "The Intellectuals in the Political Development of the New States," Baud and Rutten conclude that (post)colonial "societies and economies provide specific contexts that shape the political roles and types of intellectuals" (11). In employing such an interpretive 'frame', Spivak, among others, names identity and identifies naming as necessary points of entry into socio-political categorizations that make sense of hybridity and heterogeneity in multicultural and rights-based contexts. She raises a chicken-and-egg kind of query about *strategic essentialism*, which she sees as necessary to the processes of identity formation and as a self-fulfilling prophecy that shapes individual responses and reactions to the named social being and/or subjective entity. Thus, she plumbs, with fellow intellectuals, the muddy waters of identitarianism that have marked the tenor of public debate in the past five decades in the New, developed world.

Spivak has consistently historicized shifts in identity, while explaining how they necessarily and strategically (should) remain tied to essentialist notions at their moment of articulation. She is a ground-clearing and path-breaking figure who has not only witnessed and tracked, but been responsible for the fundamental shift in modes of representation and naming that has transformed the Western academy in the past five decades. In occupying the name Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, she has provided ways of understanding "what it might mean to identify a nation or a cultural form as a postcolonial in a neocolonial world" (*SR* 3). For good *and* for bad, she has set the standard for postcolonial interventions in academic theory, whether it is in the content of her positions, or the manner in which these positions are articulated in a larger public sphere. Somewhere in between these nodes, she has also lived out the title of her first published book, *Myself Must I Remake* (actually a literary study of *The Life and Poetry of W. B. Yeats*, 1974) by constantly re-thinking and revaluating her own membership in contemporary practices of Northern and North-American identity-making that are so central to understanding its academic politics.

Endnotes

[1] Spivak, in her characteristic revisionist mode, says in a cranky one page 'article' in the much-publicised new academic magazine, *interventions: international journal of postcolonial studies*, "In the era of cyberpolitics and electronic capitalism, the 'postcolonial' seems residual. At the moment, is it anything more than the name of an academic tendency?... When did we, as postcolonial critics, resist?... When I used the word 'postcolonial' in the 1980s, it came up in that connection. In the 1990s, it tended to fade away" (1: 2, 1999. 268).

[2] I am indebted to Paulomi Chakraborty, fellow postcolonial sojourner and reluctant diasporic, for this information. Reportedly when Gayatri Chakravorty, at 18, left Presidency College, Calcutta (now Kolkata), for the U.S., fellow student, admirer-from-afar, and postmodern Bengali poet, Binoy Majumdar, composed a series of poems between 1960 and 1962, titled *Phire Eso Chaka!*, addressed to the one Ishwari, who clearly fits Spivak's description. In fact, *Phire Eso Chaka!* (*Come Back, Chaka*! Calcutta: Aruna Publication, Agrayan 1383/Roman 1976) was published alternately as "Ishwari ke" and "Gayatri ke" ("To Ishwari" and "To Gayatri"), in Majumdar's own handwriting, though now it is out of print, and Majumdar now denies that he ever addressed the poems to her. (http://www.boipara.com/default.asp). Composed as a daily journal of poems or meditations on unrequited love, *Phire Eso Chaka!* may be seen as symbolic of the relation between the romantic, nationed male and its empowered, diasporic female. The inversion between the role of the one who waits and the one who goes away, with the promise of Return, is re-enacted when intellectual males from Bengal flock to events in India when Spivak is invited to speak. For example, at the 2005 conference of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in India, non-academic alumni from Jadavpur University

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were seen hanging about the venue in Hyderabad to obtain a much desired, once-in-a-lifetime glimpse of the legendary beauty and formidable intellect, Gayatri Debi! Spivak herself arrived on the podium, singing aloud a song in Bengali, before she started her keynote address! Chaka, a diminutive for Chakraborty, is often used by intellectual, love-lorn males to address many a woman carrying the surname to 'return' (his love). It is tempting in this context to use Spivak's own words about Baudelaire's "Le Cygne": "Even if one were to read the poem as no more than a direct biographical transcript, one might wonder at the historical irony that produces such a hierarchized presentation of the only beloved woman" (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present.* 152 footnote).

[3] Spivak begins to speak from her situated location as a U.S. academic, where her articulations are necessarily coloured by the history of what she calls Anglo-American hegemonic feminism. This feminism is rooted in nineteenth-century British New Woman colonial narratives/trajectories and is therefore implicated within the imperialist rhetoric of "saving brown women from brown men" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?"). Postcolonial and second-wave feminisms range themselves against this kind of 'white' feminism which had washed itself of any cognates of colour by speaking the language of global sisterhood and universal feminism, without questioning its own positioning and agenda. Thus non-white feminisms have taken on the adjectives and descriptions 'black' or 'of color' within white settler nation contexts. Spivak acknowledges that these descriptors lose "persuasive significance" in the third world context, that black and white do not make the same sense there and that race relations do not translate unproblematically in these nations which have their own complex hierarchies to deal with ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 294). But she makes the case that the "necessary stratification of colonial subject-constitution in the first phase of

capitalist imperialism makes 'color' useless as an emancipatory signifier" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 294). Thus her use of the term "strategic essentialism" finds such overwhelming resonance in current discussions of feminist subjectivity.

[4] Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean offer an example of Spivak's reach and appeal. "It helps, of course, that Spivak is a very powerful and charismatic speaker. When she came to Detroit, for instance, in March 1991, she addressed a large, metropolitan, racially and ethnically mixed audience at the Detroit Institute of Arts as part of its Lines speaker series on new writing in America. Her lecture, "War and Cultures," addressed questions of multiculturalism with reference to the linguistically hybrid work of Guillermo Gómez Peña, the Chicarrican artist from Tijuana-San Diego, and an installation by the Lebanese-Canadian artist Jamelie Hassan, in the highly charged political context of U.S. anti-Arab racism at the time of the Gulf War. Not only did Spivak receive a standing ovation, a fairly unusual response for a museum lecture from a cool urban crowd, but she was also accompanied afterward to the reception followed by her talk by an enthusiastic group of African American women not from the local university, but from the Detroit community. One woman carried a much-read copy of Spivak's translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. Her daughter, also part of the group, was reading *In Other Worlds* for a course at her inner-city high school. For these women, Spivak's feminist critique of the links between racism and capitalism had been crucial for their intellectual development. *They embraced her as a profoundly political sister, not as an inaccessible academic*" ("Introduction: Reading Spivak." *The Spivak Reader* 3, emphasis mine).

[5] The word 'Indian' is often used by writers of Indian origin to stand in for the entire subcontinent that is flanked by the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and

the Arabian Sea. This attests of course to the hegemony of writers writing in English from that part of the world, but the term itself has been challenged by writers belonging to the postcolonial nations like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and other places where the subcontinental presence is substantial enough, such as Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria etc. The term that has been found acceptable politically is 'South Asian,' the applicability of which, however, has again been questioned by writers like M G Vassanji, who consider themselves part of the Indian diaspora in East Africa. In Spivak's own case, she 'technically' hails from what used to be undivided Bengal, but after the division of the nation, borders and boundaries dictated that her passport be Indian. The word 'Indian' is often used interchangeably with South Asian, mostly by writers from India.

[6] I am indebted to Daphne Read for this idea of interpellation. All identities are not interpellated in the same way by categories of nomenclature or experiences of subjectivities; in fact, each identity and subjectivity has a specific socio-political and historical relationship to labels and names. This would explain why differently constituted bodies would respond differently when hailed by a policeman, or any other figure of authority, to extend the Althusserian example.

[7] Commenting on the connection between textuality and the field of politics, Spivak makes explicit the current "preoccupation with being in the library rather than being on the street" (*PC* 1). She believes that the theory/practice split is a way of obfuscating the use of a concept and launches the theme of 'worlding" to which she returns time and again in her work. She says that "the notion of textuality should be related to the notion of the worlding of a world on a supposedly uninscribed territory... this worlding actually is also a texting,

textualising, a making into art, making into an object to be understood" (*PC* 1). In *CPR*, she expands on what this worlding exactly means.

[8] An entire field of enquiry has recently sprung up around the figure of the contemporary public intellectual, notably: Maurice Berube "The Rise of the Postmodern Intellectual" (*Beyond Modernism and Postmodernism: Essays on the Politics of Culture*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group Inc., 2002. 3-20), Carl Boggs "Intellectuals" (*Understanding Contemporary Society: Theories of the Present*. eds Gary Browning, Abigail Halcli & Frank Webster. London & Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000. 296-311), Caroline S Hau "On Representing Others: Intellectuals, Pedagogy, and the Uses of Error" (*Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of the Postmodern*. eds. Paula M L Moya & Michael R Hames-Garcia. Berkeley & Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California, 2000. 133-170), Brent R Henze "Who Says Who Says?: The Epistemological Grounds for Agency in Liberatory Political Projects" (*Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of the Postmodern*. eds. Paula M L Moya & Michael R Hames-Garcia. Berkeley & Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California, 2000. 229-250), Russell Jacoby "Missing Intellectuals? (*The Last Intellectuals*. Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1987. 3-26), Deborah Jones "Knowledge Workers 'R' Us: Academics, Practitioners, and 'Specific Intellectuals'" (*Managing Knowledge: Critical Investigations of Work and Learning*. eds. Craig Pritchard, Richard Hull, Mike Chumer & Hugh Willmott. New York & St Martin's Press, 2000. 158-75), Michael Keren "Intellectuals without Borders" (*International Intervention: Sovereignty versus Responsibility*. eds. Michael Keren & Donald A Sylvan. London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 2002. 27-39), John Michael "Fundamental Confusion" (*Anxious Intellectuals: Academic Professional, Public Intellectuals, and Enlightenment Values*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000. 1-19), Peter Osborne

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"Introduction: Philosophy, and the Role of Intellectuals" (*A Critical Sense: Interviews with Intellectuals.* New York: Routledge, 1996. vii-xxvii)

[9] See Peter Osborne's discussion of public intellectuals and cultural power in the following paragraph. Also see Spivak's response to being labeled a "cultural broker" in "Questioned on Translation: Adrift." (*Public Culture* 13: 1, 2001. 13-22): "I believe becoming a cultural broker has been an unintended consequence of my translating Mahasweta Devi, but not surely Jacques Derrida? And what 'culture' does Mahasweta represent?"

[10] Spivak explains in "Cultural Talks in the Hot Peace: Revisiting the 'Global Village'" how the world and the academe/institution feed into each other in a circular loop. "From our academic or 'cultural work' niches, we can supplement the globe-girding movements with 'mainstreaming,' somewhere between moonlighting and educating public opinion." in Pheng Cheah & Bruce Robbins eds. *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. 337.

[11] Stephen Slemon, in his feedback to this essay, inserts the important caveat that it is a "curiously liberal assumption" that these academics "choose the interview" as a form for dissemination of their ideas. He suggests that "in the context of (1) a radical absence of documentary film-making within mainstream US cinema, and (2) the proliferation of media appropriations of critical thought by the sound-bite and by watered-down anecdote, one could argue that the interview, as forum for social discussion, precedes any specific choices these public intellectuals make, and in fact is part of the conditions public intellectuals have to navigate in order to reach a wider audience — not something they choose, so much, as something that precdes, or indeed 'chooses,' them."

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[12] The tradition of academic interviewing was granted legitimacy within university and publishing regimes by the phenomenal success in the genre of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

[13] Spivak speaks at length about the "invocation of the pervasive oppression of Woman in every class and race stratum" as ultimately a justification of the "institutional interests of the (female) academic" ("The Political Economy of Women as Seen by a Literary Critic." in Elizabeth Weed ed. *Coming to Terms: feminism, theory, politics*. New York & London: Routledge, 1989. 220). It becomes imperative therefore to ask "how, not in terms of the institutional content of what is taught and written about, but *in terms of institutional behaviour*, is an adult worker interpellated (or identified) as a 'feminist' in the U.S. academy?" (ibid. 220). Spivak urges the utter necessity of "the importance of language acquisition for the woman from a hegemonic monolinguist culture who makes everybody's life miserable by insisting on women's solidarity at her price." ("The Politics of Translation" in Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips eds. *Destabilizing Theory: contemporary feminist debates*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992. 190). One way to redress this problem, since "we cannot all hope to learn every language under the sun, ... we must envisage our work as collective... [and] "claim that the work of feminism is necessarily interdisciplinary.... [At the same time, one must be aware that] the Army, the Foreign Service, the multi-nationals themselves, and intelligence and counter-intelligence take the necessity of language-learning with the utmost seriousness. *We have something to learn from our enemies*." ("The Political Economy of Women as Seen by a Literary Critic." 229, emphasis mine).

[14] Spivak testifies: "In my own meagre production, interviews, the least considered genre, have proved embarrassingly popular" (*CPR* Footnote, 248).

She later says in her "Response" to the "Panel of Papers on *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*" at IAPL 2000, Stony Brook, NY, "interviews after all bring forth what there is to be brought forth by the power of the question... [to make me] think differently" (*interventions: international journal of postcolonial studies*. 4: 2, 2002. 205-211).

[15] See Spivak's masterful analysis of the legitimation of the 'marginal' as the 'real' Caliban in the "Literature" section of *CPR*, where she discusses Roberto Fernandez Retamar's "Caliban," although she hopes that by the end of the book, it will be clear that she herself does not think that "the postcolonial should take Calibán as an inescapable model" (117): "The stagings of Caliban work alongside the narrativization of history: claiming to *be* Caliban legitimizes the very individualism that we must persistently attempt to undermine from within.... And, even as Caliban is defined out, it is only the produced Ariel who is allowed into the arena; the final requirement for the acceptable half-caste is a 'European liberal education'" (*CPR* 118, 164). Read this also alongside Conrad's description of his fireman, "an improved specimen" who "was useful because he had been instructed" but whose sight was only "as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs" (*Heart of Darkness* 70).

[16] I am using the word 'governed' in an ideological sense of ruling and shaping a people through culture, which is precisely what Prospero does. For an extended discussion of the relationship between the three, see Gayatri Spivak "Literature" *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 112-9.

[17] With regards to a revised answer to "Can the Subaltern Speak?": "Although the earlier version of this essay — first published in 1988 and based on a 1983 lecture — has recently been published elsewhere, Spivak declined permission for any

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version to be printed here because of the importance of the revised version for her forthcoming book, *An Unfashionable Grammatology*, and because *her revisions, although they leave her conclusions unchanged, have made the original version obsolete*." "Subaltern Talk: interview with the Editors" by Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean, *The Spivak Reader*. 287. emphasis mine. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak offers: "Can the subaltern speak? What might the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of 'woman' seems most problematic in this context. Confronted y the ferocious standardizing benevolence of most U.S. and Western European human-scientific radicalism (recognition by assimilation) today, and the exclusion of the margins of even the center-periphery articulation (the 'true and differential subaltern'), the analogue of class-consciousness rather than race-consciousness in this area seems historically, disciplinarily, and practically forbidden by the Right and Left alike." ("History" 281-82). See also p 310 in *CPR* for a three-point explanation of what the subaltern is *not*.

[18] Chromatism is one of Spivak's pet peeves. "Chromatism seems to have something like a hold on the official philosophy of anti-racist feminism. When it is not 'third world women,' the buzzword is 'women of color.' This leads to absurdities. Japanese women, for instance, have to be coded as 'third world women!' Hispanics must be seen as 'women of colour,' and postcolonial female subjects, even when they are women of the indigenous elite of Asia and Africa, are invited to masquerade as Caliban in the margins. This nomenclature is based on the implicit acceptance of 'white' as 'transparent' or 'no-color,' and is therefore reactive upon the self-representation of the white. (*CPR* "Literature" 164-65).

[19] One of my methods of paying critical attention to Spivak's oeuvre is to cite her in full in the footnotes, instead of extrapolating impressive and pithy 'sound-

bytes' that would support my argument only in part. This is also in part an admiring imitation of her own footnoting style.

[20] The Spivak-Eagleton spat can be traced back to "Love Me, Love My Ombre, Elle" (*Diacritics*. 14: 4, Winter 1984. 19-36.) in which Spivak responds to "the implications of this counter-narrative that provoke the moral outrage against Derrida, which ranges from the conservative to the radical in literary criticism. For it is indeed a moral outrage rather than disinterested refutation (whatever that may be) that we encounter from the opponents of deconstruction. What do M H Abrams, Dennis Donaghue, and Terry Eagleton have in common, apart from their distaste of Derrida?" (21) Spivak does clarify in a footnote on the same page that "Eagleton has since ['The Idealism of American Criticism'] produced a guarded apology for Derrida as a 'post-structuralist' in *Literary Theory*." Their disagreement comes to a head with Eagleton's vituperative review of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* titled "In the Gaudy Supermarket" in the *London Review of Books* (21: 10, May 1999. http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n10/eagl2110.htm). The review includes comments such as "She has probably done more long-term political good, in pioneering feminist and post-colonial studies within global academia, than almost any of her theoretical colleagues. And like all such *grand mâitresses*, she now has to deal with that ultimate source of embarrassment, her devoted acolytes" (p 3 of 7).

[21] David Huddart offers two sustained critiques of Spivak's work; one a review of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* titled "Transnational Literacy" (*Contemporary Literature*. 41: 2, Summer 2000. 382-393) and another centred on "Spivak's argument about the subaltern — particularly subaltern *agency*" ("Making an Example of Spivak" *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*. 6: 1, April 2001. 35-46)

[22] Varadharajan elaborates upon the effect of Spivak's style on her argumentation.

[23] The backdrop to this discussion can be found in *CPR* too, where Spivak laments the "it is not some longing for originary purity that refuses to consider this as a variety of postnational hybrid resistance. It is in fact the benign rusing face of what allows the United States to 'export democracy' to 'older cultures' even as the globe-trotting self-ethnicizers dine out on difference" (*CPR* "Culture" footnote 319).

[24] In Spivak's own words: "Let me give you a parable. You known that in Cincinnati there's this 35.6 million dollar, wonderful museum that has just opened. It is designed by Zaha Hadid, an Iraqi-American architect of extraordinary, extraordinary brilliance. In this museum there is now an extraordinary collection of art. There's a Japanese 'Chappi 33,' thirty-three life-size girl dolls in jumpsuits and hard hats. There are six disco balls by John Armleder called "Untitled (Global V)." There is Marjetica Potrc's "El Retiro Roundhouse," recycled materials designed to be quickly built by relief agencies, and so on. This is a response to our time as a time of terror – and a war against terror. Now this extraordinary museum, the Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art, and the architect, Zaha Hadid, Iraqi-American – are on one side. And I applaud it, I celebrate it, I will undoubtedly go to it. Full of contemporary conceptual art relating to the war on terror. On the other side is the destruction of the great museum in Baghdad, the library burned and looted.... That is my parable. Imperialism has become racialized in a new way. Extraordinary diasporics are being used to give support to the idea that the United States is going to save the world." ("What is Enlightenment?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Conversing with Jane Gallop. *Polemic: Critical or Uncritical.* New York: Routledge, 2004. 180.) Also, paralleling Leela Gandhi's contention that "postcoloniality derives it power" from both the "colonial scene" and "the come-on of colonialism," Spivak too warns against the practice of "non-Western critics located in the West to present their cultural inheritance as knowledge" (Gandhi 22, ix).

[25] Kwame Anthony Appiah in "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonialism?" (*Critical Inquiry* 17, Winter 1991. 336-57) cites Sara Suleri as "being treated as an 'otherness machine' and being heartily sick of it" (*Meatless Days*. Chicago, 1989. 105). He goes on to say, "Perhaps the predicament of the postcolonial intellectual is simply that *as* intellectuals—a category instituted in black Africa by colonialism—we are, indeed, always at risk of becoming otherness machines, with the manufacture of alterity as our principle role. Our only distinction in the world of texts to which we are latecomers is that we can mediate it to our fellows" (356).

[26] See "Nostalgic Narratives and the Otherness Industry" where I make a similar point about the pull of the nation for its prodigal sons and daughters.

[27] Title of Adrienne Rich's collection of poems.

[28] Master's tools: reference to Audre Lorde.

[29] I am indebted to Sara Ahmed for this formulation, at a workshop *Is Affect Multicultural?: Decolonizing Affect Theory Colloquium*, June 25-27, 2006, Green College, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

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[30] Supplementarity: "... in the old days, marginalia were, in fact, rather important. Textual criticism in the pre-modern period is much interested in marginalia. In the early print culture in the West it was in the margins that the so-called argument of the paragraph or set of paragraphs was written. I would like to take away the current notion of marginality, which implicitly valorizes the center. It is, for the critic, a necessarily self-appointed position which is basically an accusing position. It seems to me that I would like to reinvent this kind of marginality which I now find: an exclusion from various turfs" ("The New Historicism: Political Commitment and the Postmodern Critic" interview with Harold Veeser. *PC* 156)

[31] See discussion on standpoint theory by Susan Hekman and comment on the same by Nancy C M Hartsock in *Signs*. 22: 2, 1997.

[32] Spivak speaks at length on what she means by "regulative psychobiography" in "The Political economy of Women as Seen by a Literary Critic": "It is the model narratives that give 'meanings' to our readings of ourselves and others. *We* are used to working with variations on, critiques of, and substitutions for, the narratives of Oedipus and Adam. What narratives produce the signifiers of the subject for other traditions? Always in a confrontation and complicity with the epistemic re-constitution of the subject-in-imperialism, traces of this psychobiography can be found in the indigenous legal tradition, in the scriptures, and of course, in myth. (I mention myth last because, structuralized or folklorized, it has become hard to use in the way I am describing.) However humble the woman or women you are considering, the grandeur of the regulative psychic narrative remains undiminished." in Elizabeth Weed ed. *Coming to Terms: feminism, theory, politics*. New York & London: Routledge, 1989. 227.

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[33] In Spivak's own words: "We have to face this difficult truth: that internalized gendering by women, perceived as an ethical choice, accepts exploitation as its accepts sexism in the name of a willing conviction that this is how one is good as a woman, even ethical as a woman. We must fight to pass laws, and be vigilant that they are implemented. But the real force of the struggle comes from the actual players' contemplating the possibility that to organize against homeworking is not to stop being a good woman, a responsible woman, a real woman (therefore with husband and home), a woman, and only then walk with us in a two-way response structure toward the possibility of a presupposition that is more than a task merely of thinking on both sides: that there are more ways than one of being a good woman." ("Cultural Talks in the Hot Peace: Revisiting the 'Global Village.'" in Pheng Cheah & Bruce Robbins eds. *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. 342-43.

[34] Joan Wallace Scott argues in the important essay, "Experience," that "Experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* is in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore political" (37).

[35] Vijay Mishra theorises how the idea and prospect of a Return, however tentative and mediated, to the country of origin, is a favourite myth and fantasy of diasporic individuals, a myth rendered all the more believable and a fantasy all the more nurtured in an age of global travel. This myth is now assuming a texture of some reality for engineers and software technicians of India, who are indeed relocating their bases of operation from silicone valleys of the USA in California to silicone valleys of India in Bangalore; see Saritha Rai's "Indians Find They Can Go Home Again" on 26th December 2005, Business/World

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Business, *New York Times*. Accessed 27th December 2005. <http://www.nytimes.com/glogin?URI=http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/26/business/worldbusiness/26recruit.html&OQ=emcQ3Deta1&OP=644adb81Q2FQ27Q51SdQ27Q5CcQ3DoQ2FcceaQ27awwHQ27Q24aQ27ajQ27d-o6uSooQ27Q51cQ2FQ5DQ5Cd-o6uSooQ27ajQ2FSQ3DQ2F-6ePIerQ5D>

[36] This is a move also made by Barbara Johnson, translator of Jacques Derrida's *Dissemination*. Mary E John in *Discrepant Dislocations* tells us that in a "remarkable self-critique" and "as a deconstructivist theorist within the field of literature," Johnson "framed the introduction to her collection of essays *A World of Differnece* as a reevaluation of her own prior work, its theoretical and canonical structures. Notwithstanding the promise contained in her earlier book's title, *The Critical Difference*, difference had, she felt, been effectively erased.... Her more acute sense of the internal boundaries fostered by the academic institution as a real locus of power also led to hitherto unexplored questions of address and the politics of her own identity as a white woman" (Mary E John. "Partial Theories/Composite Theories." *Discrepant Dislocations: Feminism, Theory and Postcolonial Histories*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California, 1996. 29-68).

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CONCLUSION: SITES OF CONTENTION

At the Movies, in the Classroom, and at the Conferences

> "Indian women" is not a feminist category.... There is an ethno-cultural agenda, an obliteration of Third World specificity as well as a denial of cultural citizenship, in calling them merely "Indian."
>
> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak "The Politics of Translation"
>
> *Outside in the Teaching Machine* 187.

In Chapter One, I indicated that this dissertation is an internal critique of the way in which subcontinental postcolonial and diasporic feminists have deployed the term 'women of colour' to carve out an institutional speaking position. I took as my constituent group four scholars who, interpellated by the nominal essence of an 'Indianness,' have used it to hotfoot around their classed privilege and national affiliations in the racialised knowledge economy of the West, and especially within the feminist nation. I did this with some trepidation, apprehensive of how my critique might be used in some quarters to revert to an old hegemonic position and to argue for the legitimacy of feminist essentialism. But the fear of being co-opted within relations of ruling is one that all oppositional positions have to contend and live with. It cannot become a mitigating factor for not having debates on our respective positions within essentially conceived group dynamics, for checking the welcome possibility of dissent within the groups, or for airing out our own points of contention with the group. The culture and politics of dissent is an essential ingredient in keeping democratic debate alive within group formations and for revising their mandate and maps of meaning-making[1].

I was emboldened in my explorations around essentialism by the realisation that what I was saying about 'Indianness' was not particularly treacherous, suspect or radical. The model of hotfooting had been set for me by an earlier example in a Canadian publication edited by Himani Bannerji called *Returning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism and Politics* (1993). This collection contained the important essay by Dionne Brand and Linda Carty critiquing the production of the 'woman of colour' within the state-sanctioned framework of 'visible minorities' in Canada. It also contained an article by Anita Sheth and Amita Handa titled "A Jewel in the Frown: Striking Accord Between India/n Feminists,"[2] where they make the argument for not mincing their words about 'Indianness' in the potential scenario that those words might be mis-used. Sheth and Handa undertake a brave exercise in self-examination of the ways in which South Asian and India/n[3] in-group privilege and exclusionary practices operate.

Fellow graduate students at the Ontario Institute of Secondary Education, University of Toronto in the late 1980s, Sheth and Handa talk across the complicated differences of respectively being categorised by the other, as 'Anglo-Indian' (i.e. of mixed British and Indian blood/heritage) and as 'Indo-Canadian' (i.e. having a hyphenated identity/nationality). They discuss the exclusionary and judgmental ways in which they have 'seen' each other, picking up visual clues from each other's demeanour and body language in the world they inhabit, and quite unselfconsciously indulging in purist notions of being Indian and *Indian woman* especially. They catch themselves at this politics of scrutiny only when exploring how their positions on class, gender, sexuality and national or bifurcated sense of belonging, were implicated in these ways of seeing. The prescient, provocative and courageous before-its-time, heart-to-heart exchange between Sheth and Handa discusses the multiple meanings of their being 'Indian' in the volatile spaces of diaspora and miscegenation: these two descriptors are my readings of their 'place' and they may not be happy with them at all. Although I would like to point out that the intersection between them is bound up in ideas of essence: miscegenation has to do with an interest in preserving the purity of the dominant race; diaspora with the purity of both the place of origin and the nation of domicile. Both categories of identification, however troublesome and tricky, lead to very interesting subject positions and practical politics.

After 60 hours of recorded conversation, Sheth and Handa request anti-racist feminists, Himani Bannerji and Sherene H Razack, to be their interlocutors and comment on their conversation about Indianness. At this moment, "faced with four different possibilities, the topic of identity leaves behind its usual rigidity, [and] its closed character of fixed cultural values and forms" flies out of the window (*RG* xx). The result is one of "scuttling any settled identity, definition or stereotype of being 'South Asian' or 'Indian,' and instead becomes one of foregrounding the issue of racism, which, turns out to be the key reason for *wanting* a fixed identity in the first place" (ibid., emphasis mine). But having undertaken this productive exercise, Sheth and Handa start worrying that their critique might be appropriated by the hegemonic (white) feminist community to argue against identity politics of the cultural kind. Their unease arises from "wanting to resist the white referent point, while knowing full well that the language we use and the systems we live in daily still bind us to it" (Sheth & Handa, 41). I reproduce their argument in full:

> The questions we want to raise about our cultural privileging and racial prejudices are sensitive and risky. They are sensitive because we are *opening up a level of discussion that might not be safe to have at this historical moment*. They are risky because we are not sure how white people will appropriate and use this information. But we feel strongly that the time has come for us as India/n feminists to talk to each other about our India/nness. There is a sense of unease that we feel when we choose to be silent for fear of providing material to white groups interested in, for example, furthering their racist domination. We have learned to be suspicious of even "progressive" white people who choose *to interpret the anti-essentialist line as an end in itself, as a way of reproducing the invisibility of differences*, thereby offering no radical alternative to the idea of the "generic human" which is characteristic of the white liberal stand. We have also learned to be suspicious of white folks who put forth the "reverse discrimination charge" as a way of holding on to the centre. (Sheth & Handa. 40-41 emphasis mine).

Sheth and Handa raise these issues in 1992, and my hope is that their prophetic and nuanced exchange, which has not garnered much uptake in the past fifteen years may be taken forward with felicity in 2007, though the conditions that govern the state of othered and marginalised peoples have become even more dire in white-settler colonies as they reach their imperialist, megalomaniac apotheosis in the name of acting for freedom and democracy. If we are to do politics and engender transformation in an anti-colonial, anti-racist feminist way, we need to examine our own house and analyse *how* we use the tools that are the legacy of the masters.

The hotfooting around essentialism and dance around difference that Sheth and Handa take up is surely a familiar one in any coalitional space that is based on a particular identity, as participants in that space figure out the different ways in which they enter into it. The interesting, and to my mind, quite problematic, slippage Sheth and Handa make in their initiation of the dialogue on Indianness is to construct 'India/n' as a *racial* category and not a national one. They both invest in the idea of "India/n as a cultural/racial category" (*RG* 44) and within fundamentalist diasporic discourses of the subcontinent, this would have a very powerful appeal, as evidenced in the propaganda of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bharatiya Janata Party or the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and their fund-raising activities amongst the diasporic Non-Resident Indian population. Even in the influential work of diasporic writers like V S Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh and Vijay Mishra, the 'epic imaginary' that being an Indian entails[4] is based a bit unselfconsciously and uncritically on being Hindu.[5] However, this would not be the general understanding of Indian or Canadian in the context of modern notions of nationhood and democracies. Even if the racial/cultural sensibility is akin to an imagined Hindu community, someone like Salman Rushdie or Rohinton Mistry would have a very different class and cosmopolitan take on it.

At this point, I would like to take up Razack's interjection into this conversation around Indianness within the racialised space of diaspora. Asked about the 'place' of race in gender formations in multicultural white settler colonies, Razack cautions against emphasising 'race' at the expense of class in inter- and intra- group relations. She gestures to other realities in different geo-political spheres, using the Caribbean as an example:

> In the academy, class disappears. We can't let it disappear; race is not pure. You are doing to class exactly what we don't want to do with gender. *Talking only about shades of skin promotes a simplistic domino effect (from white to Black) analysis.* But how do you incorporate class into the domino effect? In the Caribbean, Indian/Black relations are very different and specific to region. In Trinidad, for instance, you're talking about *two majority populations* where Indians function as a merchant class but have never had political power until recently. *Also, the Trinidadian national identity has very much been constructed as a "Black" identity into which Indians have a very difficult time fitting*. So the question of racialism and Indian/Black relations is a lot more complex than colour analysis brings out and there is a danger in homogenizing or exporting an analysis from and about one part of the world to another. *What is interesting however, is what happens to our identities, what we do to each other within this context.*
>
> (These comments are a paraphrase by S&H, *RG* 71-72, emphasis mine).

I am interested in this paraphrase of Razack's commentary as it helps me to explore the idea/l of Indianness within what Michael Omi & Howard Winant call a "geography of race" (qtd. *CJWL*46) or what E A Markham calls the "aesthetic of pigmentocracy" in the Caribbean (xxviii). I am not implying that this is Razack's intention or the sole thrust of her work; it is not. I am suggesting however that Razack's affiliation with being "urban" and "Muslim" in Trinidad (*Matikor* 165), on the one hand already places her outside the space of its legitimate nationalistic imaginary, and on the other allows her to distance herself from the 'backward, oppressed Hindu women' she represents in her legal research/academic work, as analysed in Chapter Two.

Razack here is obviously anticipating some of the predominant themes of her subsequent work, namely, what do we *do* with pre-existing identities in the new, delocalised, dislocated site of race politics? As a self-confessed Indo-Trinidadian (though not self-identified necessarily: there is a difference), Razack points out the complicated ways in which racial identity-making and *identification* is imbricated in the common-sense and daily imaginary of a nation. For her, 'Indian' sits in the sticky, uncomfortable site of "intermediacy" that M G Vassanji, A Sivanandan, Farida Karodia, Agnes Sam and others diasporics discuss in their work on ports of embarkation, call and arrival in the context of Indian settlement in East and South Africa respectively.[6] Here I submit that self-confessed is what we offer up by way of an admission about one's *many* different aspects of identity, so it goes into the holistic composition of our critical inventory of the self. Self-identified is the privileging of *one* aspect of one's identity in order to mobilise it for socio-political purposes, or what may also be called strategic essentialism or identity politics. So Razack is a self-confessed urban, Muslim, Indo-Trinidadian but a self-identified woman of colour from the global North.

Razack's astute observation that Trinidad and Tobago is imagined and constructed as a black nation points to the ways 'race,' 'religion' or indeed any category becomes an overwhelming identifier only when the socio-political and moral-cultural *ownership over the place* in which it will be operative is moot or *in question*. Here, not only is the age-old narrative about who came to the land first being utilised to stake 'black' ownership in the West Indies, but also a divisory, bifurcated and entirely colonised history being created between slavery and indentured labour.

Shani Mootoo attests to a similar imposition and construction of identity and *belonging* in the racialised Trinidadian nation and how it particularly implicates the ethnicised Indian woman:

> Growing up in Trinidad in what is called an Indian family, as an impressionistic spectator to the Black Power movement of the early seventies, I had constantly been torn between having to be the mythical good Indian girl and being Trinidadian. My father's mother was second generation, from Indian and Nepalese parents. I remember her forever trying to teach us children Hindi, the principles of Hinduism, and exhorting us to be good Brahmin girls. I wish I could ask her if, at that time, she might have thought that the two identities, of being Indian and being Trinidadian — (*Trinidadian meaning predominantly White, or Black*) — could have cohabited.... Being a good Indian girl meant being a tourist in my own country. I desired to know that which was forbidden: to *belong* to the tinkling of the backyard steelpan; to learn to play that pan; to *belong* on Carnival Tuesday, to the sweat on the faces and skin of masqueraders as they paraded down the streets; to *belong* to the beat of their shuffle, *weary yet relentless in a ritual that to me was a testament and pledge of citizenship.* ("Dual Citizenship" 19, emphasis mine)

Here we have to juxtapose Razack's purported difficulty of 'Indians' as an ethnic enclave in fitting into the 'black' national consciousness of Trinidad with Mootoo's admission of the ideological strictures of the diaspora-at-home to conform to and cement the notion of an earlier, more legitimate nation of origin, affiliation and belonging as well as control the class and gender barriers in the nation of adoption (blackness, you will notice, in Mootoo's work, is presented as a class entity from which 'good' Indians have to be shielded and protected: backyard, sweat, skin, street, shuffle)[7].

If Razack contends that Indians refuse to accept the idea of Trinidad as predominantly black, then we also have to add on to this Mootoo's nuance about the hands-off approach or self-abdication of Hindus/Indians[8] (however reluctant and/or forced) from such a claim to/of nationality/nationalism. These back and forth movements and constant re-/qualifications on the part of the diaspora are not just self-indulgent vacillations between the two posts of existence, but offer us illuminating ways of conceptualising identity and community: one site necessarily sheds light on the other site of (un-)belonging. The Trinidad and Tobago model may tell us something about how race relations and the nation are conceived of in Canada, and how we may respond to such different models of popular and official multiculturalism[9].

The ways in which diasporic intellectuals and scholars play with Indianness fits into my current obsession with the strategic essentialisms and critical interrogations of identity by 'Indian' scholars in Anglo-North America. I am also provoked in these discussions to look at how we self-inhabit categories of identity and how we confess and profess to them in political situations. Further, the acceptance of a nominal essentialism enables us to then take up these very identity categories for necessary scrutiny. However, as scholars, researchers, conference presentors and teachers, all of us are faced with situations where the public assertion of our essentialism leads only to the consolidation of the same. These are situations in which the best theoretical stratagems fail us and all we can do is try to step off the slippery slope of essentialism and bite our tongue. Here I take up an informal discussion of some personal examples of essentialism at the movies, at the conference and in the community.

Brown Women Saving Brown Women from Brown Men: or Three Cheers for Indian Widowhood!

> "White men are saving brown women from brown women," a sentence that runs like a red thread through today's "gender and development."
>
> Spivak, "History," *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 284.

In 2005, Indo-Canadian film-maker, Deepa Mehta, finally released *Water*, her long-awaited, controversial film about Indian widows. I did not see it for a long time, having found her previous directorial ventures ambitious, but quite simplistic and formulaic. In *Fire*, her depiction of an inadvertent lesbian/love-relationship between two sisters-in-law in India (1996), and in *Earth*, her 1998 film adaptation of Bapsi Sidhwa's 1991 novel, *Cracking India*, on the traumatic partition of India and Pakistan, I had experienced Mehta's directorial hand to be too addicted to populist short-cuts. And then *Water* was nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Foreign Film category in 2007 (the fourth Hindi language film after *Mother India* in 1957, *Salaam Bombay!* in 1989 and *Lagaan* in 2001). I felt compelled to say something that would 'put right' Mehta's narrative of widows for what I thought was a predominantly 'international' audience. Here I found myself caught between the essence of my national and diasporic identity, and hotfooting between an 'objective' account of Indian widowhood and my completely 'subjective' reaction to Mehta's version. I wrote about this as a review piece for *Herizons*, a Canadian feminist magazine (to be published in fall, 2007). I reproduce below the exact review, and leave it at that as an unedited example of vehement, outraged essentialism of the national versus the diasporic kind.

The Review:

The trouble with Deepa Mehta's *Water* is not that it is not a good film. It is a good film on many counts. It feels properly (indeed laudably) feminist, it feels properly researched (not withstanding charges of plagiarism that were settled out of court in Delhi regarding the alleged source, acclaimed Bengali writer, Sunil Gangopadhyay's 1981 novel, *Sei Samay* or *Those Days*), it feels properly attacked in India for being 'unpatriotic' (that bane of feminist and of diasporic existence), it feels properly lush and beautifully shot (as 'Indian' films should), and it feels properly publicised (the saga of how Mehta was forbidden to shoot the film in Varanasi by Hindu fundamentalists now immortalised in print by her daughter, Devyani Saltzman, in *Shooting Water: A Mother-Daughter Journey and the Making of the Film,* even though immediately after Uttar Pradesh denied her permission, she was invited by the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh chief ministers to shoot the film in their states). Most of all, *Water* uses the by-now familiar, easy-to-decipher and simplistic Mehta strategy in the elemental trilogy: truth telling through the voice and eyes of the innocent/child. Repeating the trope of the speechless, childlike Biji in *Fire* who has to sit through the servant's masturbations as he watches hard porn and see her daughters-in-law fornicating with each other in lesbian abandon and of the eight-year old Lenny Sethna in *Earth* who witnesses the ravages of the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan, Mehta in *Water* again employs the services of the child protagonist, Chuyia, to lay bare the realities of a subcontinental country forever caught between the bugbears of tradition and modernity. It is a pity, and doubly effective, that Chuyia is played by the wonderful Sri-Lankan child-artist, Sarala! We don't even have to exercise our wee brains about what to think. The child-narrator does it beautifully for us, drawing our attention unerringly to the lack of basic living standards and human dignity for the millions of widows consigned to a life of penury, poverty, privation, and if young, prostitution, on the banks of Varanasi.

I will admit it. Having seen the other two elemental trilogy films, I was biased against *Water* even before it was released. But when I finally saw it, I was pleasantly surprised by how much I was drawn in by the film's narrative appeal. The stunning location in Sri Lanka evoked nothing of Benaras for me; the equally stunning Kalyani's bleached beauty did nothing to endear me to her supposed innocence and naiveté. But I was still pulled in. It was only with a semi-detached eye that I saw myself mesmerized by young Chuyia's bubbly charm and sincere belief that her mother would come back for her, with dismay and distress that I witnessed her initiation into a life of widowhood, without joy, without colour, and worst of all, without food. It was with gladness that I celebrated the widows' community of lonely togetherness and with exuberance that I too partook of the festival of coloured powder that would be washed off in the next day's dreary monotony. It was with real interest that I listened to the conversations between the pious Sadananda and the regally restrained Shakuntala that raised the most important questions in the film: what is it that women are asked to follow, obey and cherish in the name of god, in the name of religion, in the name of custom? What erasure of selfhood, identity and right to life will satisfy the dictates of a patriarchal society using its unbridled power to subdue and conquer its female constituency? And how is it that women even begin to break the chains of crippling, all-consuming tradition?

It was not with enthusiasm however that I saw the romantic angle in the film introduced. That was the moment that the film started going off the proverbial Indian railway track for me. Not because Narayan is not dishy nor because compulsory heterosexuality does not have its uses, but because this is the moment that the film detaches itself from contextual issues and local struggles that were already well in place by the 1930's, the years the film is set in. For a full hundred years before this, Hindu Reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj and the Theosophical Society, myriad activists like Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Shri Aurobindo and writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, etc. had been waging battles for emancipation (of women especially) from the shackles of a rigid, tradition-bound society. Indeed, these social movements formed the backbone of the women's movement in India and included organisations like Seva Sadan, Stree Zoroastrian Mandal, Mahila Samitis, All India Muslim Women's Conference, Women's Indian Association and the National Council of Indian Women[10]. By the 1920's, women were active in many walks of life and actively contributing to the Indian Independence movement. Names like Kadambini Basu, Hilda Lazarus, Begum Rokeya, Sister Subbalaksmi, Ramabai Ranade, Sarla Devi Chaudharani, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Muthulakshmi Reddi, Sarojini Naidu, Margaret Cousins and Rameshwari Nehru are only a few that dot the map of women's movement in this period. Mehta does not signal any of this rich historical thickness in her film. Instead, she uses Mahatma

Gandhi as the only and easily-recognisable (in the West) shorthand through which she depicts a nation in the throes of transformation and social turbulence. She relies on the *individual act of protest* in its binary glory: on the one hand, Kalyani has no option but to commit suicide, on the other, Chuyia is literally and figuratively put on the train to independence by Shakuntala. This is a favourite tool of 'individual action' so central to the making of the feminist or activist self in the West: witness the erasure of Rosa Park's Civil Rights background and valuable experience with the NAACP in the *popular* celebration of her 'singular' act of refusal to give up the seat on the segregated bus. While those involved with these social movements are well aware of the historical contextuality that incites, provokes and makes possible such 'individual' acts in the first place, within the common public realm, such specificity is often erased in the effort to extract the individual and make her the exceptional integer in grassroots community activism. It is the job of the conscientious writer, filmmaker and creative artist to provide the whole picture and not succumb to such populist legend-making.

All this is not to deny the real and continuing issue of widows in India and their exploitation in the twenty-first century. It is an all-too dismal and universally recognisable phenomenon that post-independence, the rights of the women in nation-states like India, as in many other countries, have been increasingly circumscribed and feminists everywhere are facing renewed and unprecedented onslaught in this age of recalcitrant fundamentalism masquerading as nationalism and patriotism. As Nilanjana S Roy sums up in the review piece, "Fire and Water" in *The Telegraph*, a Calcutta based English daily, "I hope *Water* will be screened, again and again, in India. Not because I'm a fan of Deepa Mehta's work, but because the story she chose to tell, about women who are systematically exploited in the name of religion, who are forced into silence, is a story that continues in the present, and that we would prefer to believe belongs to the past. The debate over Deepa Mehta has, one hopes, finally died down; perhaps it's time to look at the debate she wanted *Water* to provoke. (Sunday, 19th March 2006. http://www.telegraphindia.com/1060319/asp/look/story_5979177.asp)

The debate indeed merits a fresh look, but the terms of the discourses that dictate cross-cultural enquiry and the conditions that govern reception also need to be kept firmly in the picture. Within the societies of their origin (which is always assumed to be the 'native' country instead of the country of adoption, of domicile and of diasporic existence of the director), films like *Water* call for a rethinking of the role of women in the polity and of the restructuring of traditional social relations. Predictably, responses in India have been predominantly to the *making* of the film and raised the prickly and contentious question about who can *authentically* speak for India's widows. There, debates have ranged along nationalist/patriotic/Hindu fundamentalist lines and feminist questionings of the same. Responses in the West have also emphasized the difficulties of shooting the film in India and have drowned any debates about the merits of the film itself, witness the latest pre-Oscar focus on Mehta in *The Globe and Mail* ("Review and Sports, 20th February 2007). In fact, Mehta has made quite a career out of these 'oppositions' to the making and reception of her films, as evidenced in the case of *Fire* and now *Water*, where she as a native informant, positions

India as the benighted backward realm of superstition and tradition, while she soars to glory on the wings of a truly free feminism in Canada. However, and more dangerously, interpretations of the film have followed a liberal feminist trajectory of "saving brown women from brown men" and made the 'widow' stand in for all Indian womanhood, whereby she has to be rescued from her historical and traditional oppression by her emancipated sister from the West. As Laila Lalami argues recently in her review of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *The Caged Virgin* and Irshad Manji's *The Trouble with Islam Today*, such monochromatic representations of women of the 'developing' or 'Third World' are saturated with "the burden of pity" ("The Missionary Position." *The Nation*. 19th June, 2006. 23-33). They completely ignore the local and situated women's networks and instead prop up women *there* as pawns in the game of empire and colonization.

My point is not that films like this should not be made. We need more films like this with feminist content. My quarrel instead is with the politics of representation of 'third world' women in the West that has been the bone of contention since second wave feminism. My quarrel is with Mehta's lack of directorial rigour and honesty that *repeatedly* makes her exploit flashpoints of history in a completely ahistorical manner and reinforces the image of the 'third world' woman who needs to be rescued by her 'first world' sister. Even though the film is a feature, the politics of representation of 'third world' women in the West ensures that it is 'read' i.e. viewed as a documentary. That is, the fictionalized account of what might have happened, indeed might continue to happen, to widows left in charge of ashrams is taken to be 'proof' of the atrocities committed against them in the name of *dharma* and tradition. Such diasporic directors who train their lenses towards their 'home' countries are seen as authentic native informants who will give us an insider's view of what it is like to be an Indian widow, indeed what it is like to be an Indian woman. This means that one's response to the film can only be one of splitting: on the one hand, the lack of any contextual analysis and critique of the practice of child marriage because *cultural difference* is exoticised and make inexplicable in the same instant, and on the other, the freeze framing forever of the image of the oppressed woman *there* who needs to be rescued, accompanied by a complete absence of any kind of equivalences between the women's movement there and the women's movement here. After all, who can compete with something like widows? Thus the commonest responses to *Water* here have been: "Oh! It is a beautiful film! So colourful!" and "How many widows are burnt in ashrams in India today?"

My response to Mehta's film is filtered through the self-positioned lens of a reluctant diasporic woman. Given that women from 'third world' countries have the burden placed on them of eternal backwardness and oppression, given that they are supposed to be the 'objects' of emancipation, and given that their Western sisters are forever ready to fill in the task of uplifters, it is imperative that we ask ourselves, why should *Water* be deemed such a feminist triumph for Deepa Mehta? At one time, white men were entrusted with the task of saving brown women from brown men's odious demands, laws and customs. Postcolonial theory provides reams of analysis on how colonial rulers 'amended' the local laws of heathen, colonised nations in the nineteenth century to better carry the white man's burden (see the work of Sophie Gilmartin, Ania Loomba, Lata Mani, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, to name but a few). Then the baton of emancipation passed on to imperial feminists who, entrusted with the task of sharing their brethren's task, provided the raison d'etre for rescuing those poor women from their patriarchal societies. The rhetoric gets cemented especially in 'culture'-specific issues surrounding the practice of sati, the veil, female-genital mutilation etc., all of which get consolidated in socio-political moves like 'saving Afghani women from the Taliban'. Now it is the 'brown girls' from those nations who have seen the light (because they now live in enlightened, emancipated countries) to eagerly further the job of rendering third world women forever backward, forever oppressed, forever having only the option of death by water. The damage done by Mehta's *Water* is vastly political in re-positing an old colonial formulation in a neo-colonial/global context. The bouquets as well as the brickbats for *Water* proclaim a triumph of the belief that women in third world countries live in a time warp, that women in third world countries have been untouched by the mythical lure of feminist progression, and this is the most important point of all, that no women in those countries are agitating for human rights, and last, that women in those countries will forever languish in their oppressed state, till truth-tellers like Mehta arrive on the scene. The reception of Mehta in Canada and many other 'Western' sites as an exemplary feminist director who dares to uncover the ugly truths of her 'native' country not only serves to cover-up the work of fantastic film-makers in India who address these issues but also continues the fiction that arrival in the 'West' opens the eyes of these benighted women to their oppression. Female *and* male film-makers in both the popular Bombay film (Bollywood) and in alternative cinema have been working on these social and feminist issues for decades now: Bimal Roy, Ketan Mehta, Sagar Sarhadi, Raj Kapoor, Shyam Benegal, Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi, Amol Palekar, Rituparno Ghosh, to compile just a random list.

The emancipation of women was and continues to be a struggle in India at every level: personal, social, economic, political. It continues to be a struggle in every part of the world. For this reason, we need films like *Water* to be made. But for this reason, we also need them to be made more responsibly and with more historical nuance. We need the gaze of the director to be piercing not only towards it 'subject' but also towards herself, her positionality, her perspective. Nowhere does Mehta *declare* her positionality in the film: the thrust of the narrative tells us what to think and how to think. One has only to contrast her with fellow hyphenated-Indian director, Mira Nair, to appreciate the nuance, delicacy and self-awareness with which the latter tackles equally burning issues without engaging in a politics of rescue or suggesting that only women *there* have these problems. Or contrast Mehta with *male* director, Pedro Almodovar, whose Spanish film, *Volver,* lost out in the Foreign Film category nominations this year. We don't want to see strong, sexy, self-reliant women supporting each other (and killing rapists in the process), do we? No, far better, by far far better to buy into the illusion that Indian widows, and indeed Indian women, have it the worst and what can we, *here*, do about them? Let us give an award to the brave brave woman who risked all odds to make such a film. Now that would be a feminist triumph. And this indeed would be the all-too predictable logic of the

Academy Awards, which would be indicative neither of the quality of the film nor its emancipatory politics. While I don't want to make the Academy Awards the arbiter of political intent or standard bearer of artistic merit, I cannot deny the cultural power an Oscar nomination wields in providing the seal of public approval. In fact, there should be no surprises in the bag if *Water* wins; such a win would be consistent with the track-record and history of the Oscars, which is where I get annoyed at the showering of such accolade on an otherwise mediocre film. After all, *Fire*, which also offered a critique of patriarchy through 'lesbian' eyes, would not win a nomination. It is a different matter that there too, I think Mehta offers easy binaries that detract from her powerful statement against a masculinist and oppressive tradition-bound culture.

By the time this review appears, Deepa Mehta will either have won for Best Foreign Language Film at the 79th Academy Awards or not. I am hoping she will not. I don't think I can handle one more question about how many poor widows are burnt and incarcerated in India today without foaming at the mouth or handing out this article in triplicate to the questioner. If Deepa Mehta wins this award, it will be an additional triumph for Canadian film-making and Canadian multiculturalism (remember Denys Arcand's win at the 76th Academy Awards for *The Barbarian Invasions* in French). But it will also be one more stone thrown at the cause of feminist struggles in sites other than the First World/global North. Viva la Indian widows: as long as there are bright, vibrant, intelligent feminists to rescue them and who can also act as native informants for their countries of origin, there will be no lack of Oscars to be won in their name!

We Don't Need Feminism, They Do:

> Well my opinion on the women's centre is that it is blatantly sexist. Sexism against men is still sexism, not to mention the implications of saying that women need protection from men. Or the implications of saying that only women can understand women. It's my opinion that the new Women's centre is a horribly bad idea and that the SU should do what it can to stop the sexism going on right now on the 3rd (or is it 4th) floor of SUB.
>
> http://webboard.su.ualberta.ca/viewtopic.php?t=1104&sid=455557853ecfe8b37c93e80db52895cb

My second personal example is from the classroom, where any pedagogic experience I might have shored up in the last fifteen years completely failed me in a moment of essentialist embarrassment. In October 2003, a Women's Centre opened up for the first time at the University of Alberta. This news was greeted with charges of "reverse sexism" in *The Gateway*, the student newspaper. Since I was taking up feminist themes in my first-year undergraduate English classroom at the time, I thought this was a really good venue for extending the conversation. The ensuing discussion was charged, and revealing. In a class of about 12 boys and 28 girls, most of the male students were quiet to begin with. To my surprise, the female students were adamant that having a women's only space at the university was a discriminatory act towards men. Most of them believed that women were equal to men now and we didn't need any such exclusive spaces or reservations for any one gender constituency. Trying to corrall the runaway conversation, I tried statistics as a way of bringing them back to a realistic sense of women's equality in the disciplinary spaces of the sciences, in business administration and in the political arena. Most of my students were still adamant that the reason there were less women at the top was because they didn't want to be there. Finally, one student burst out: it is only women in countries like India who need feminism or women's freedom. We already have it here.

This comment caught me by surprise and I immediately retaliated with something to the effect that women in countries like Canada don't necessarily have more freedom than women in countries like India. To bolster my claim, I mentioned the names of Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandarnaike, Benazir Bhutto and Khaleda Zia, who had been the elected, political heads of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively. I used those names to claim a third world politics of feminist superiority over the student's statement. But I knew I had lost the argument: my affective response to something the student had aimed at my body was proof to the class that actually it was indeed women like me, from countries like those, that needed feminism, otherwise why would I get so invested in the idea. Later, I spent many long hours mulling over ways to handle a situation like this. I knew that the smarter thing to do would have been to have listed the names and then expanded upon how having female heads of countries did not necessarily mean that feminist equality has been achieved. That patriarchy operates in many different ways as does power. A discussion of ideology and hegemony would have been perfect, both pedagogically and politically. However, all that I managed to do was to get caught in my third world essentialism. I have tried to think about this incident in many ways, but each time I come to the ungenerous conclusion that the student used the word 'Indian' because that is what I represented to her. I do not mean that she was personally affronted by an Indian teacher at the head of the class. Rather, I think the discussion about feminism exposed the common-sense everyday notion of equality that women in countries like Canada are taught to believe is theirs for the taking. Accompanying this rhetoric, in fact crucial to its persuasive force, is its binary opposite: that women elsewhere suffer and do not have access to freedom, and that women in countries like Canada are lucky in their democratic privilege. I am quite deliberately using this kind of loose theorisation to talk about this. Theories of otherisation and difference may be *au courant* at the advanced academic level, but in the street-level and entry-level conversations about the topic of feminism, it is clear-cut who needs them and who doesn't.

Acting Out at the Conferences:

My last example is from the conference on *Third Wave Feminism* that I attended at the University of Exeter in 2002. This was a memorable conference for me in many ways. It was not my first international conference, but it was my first feminist conference, and the energy at the conference center was electric! Part of the reason for the spark among the presenters there was also because we were only about six months away from 9/11, and a lot of feminists wanted to talk about it. Elaine Showalter fired one of the first salvos by suggesting that *the* feminist agenda for the twenty-first century was to educate female suicide bombers about the folly of their actions. Showalter believed that suicide-bombing by women was a particularly heinous un- and anti-feminist act. Her second suggestion was to put women in charge at the NATO so as to control some of the damage being caused around the world by misguided women, who had simply fallen prey to their patriarchal, nationalist regimes of ruling. This is of course a classic case of the 'neutral' feminist nation feeling under siege. The moment a matter of internal security and/or solidarity crops up, the woman of colour and instigator of dissent comes under the needle of suspicion reserved for non-citizens and aliens. This threatened and defensive stance is exemplified in a particular kind of post 9/11 rhetoric E. Ann Kaplan too exhibited at the very same conference (the excerpt is from her published paper):

> While in the 1990s, US women were appropriately taken up with different projects to do with continuing to improve gender equality and organizing around women's needs, women in the rest of the world were in different situations, with different needs and agendas.... To put the question perhaps too strongly for the sake of argument: have at least some feminists achieved enough regarding gender equality that we can set aside such issues [of diverse religions, politics, perspectives] and deal with terrorism?... problems have not been solved for euro-centric women, let alone for diasporic women or women living in cultures that repress women and their bodies. Do we need to reorganize our priorities so that we focus on what women can do to help with *the battle of our times, namely terrorism*, moving on from thinking about what can be done for women, to what women can do for the world...?
>
> (10-15, emphasis mine)[11]

Kaplan's 'we' cannot underscore more concretely the militant propaganda that targeted and signaled out people of colour to prove their nationalistic affiliations following the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City in 2001. It is depressing indeed to envision a future of feminism that is so totally implicated in the machinations of modern rogue nations.

At the conference, feminists like Denise deCairnes Narain and Sherin Sadallah were quite agitated about these comments. I too was perturbed enough to 'act out': to raise my voice and object vociferously to the quite blatantly U.S. national and militaristic agenda being projected at the conference under the guise of feminist discussion. This kind of rhetoric has also circulated wildly on the internet, most notably in the case of the signature campaigns that went out asking feminists to sign up to save Afghani women from the Taliban. The 'acting out' that I and my two fellow-feminists engaged in was particularly striking in the light of the almost-complete silence on these issues on the part of the majority of the 'unmarked' feminists. Those who did agree with us, came up to us at the end of sessions and pledged their 'solidarity' with us. This was also a conference where Susan Stryker made an impassioned appeal for queer and transgender issues to be at the forefront of feminism in the twenty-first century. Her emotional plea was greeted with almost unanimous applause. The contrast between these two 'issues' is so obvious that I actually can't theorise it too much without getting agitated.

Since that conference, I have been to another international feminist conference, on "Feminisms Contesting Globalization" at the University College of Dublin in 2004. The atmosphere was a complete contrast here. The conference organisors (mainly Alibhe Smythe) had invited as the plenaries Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Cynthia Enloe, Breda Gray and Gail Lewis. The entire level of the discussion and debate was much more 'global' and 'international' as a direct result of this kind of choice. I have heard the dicta "the difference that difference makes" ten thousand times and have usually caviled against it. I have refused to accept that the mere 'presence' of difference can change the agenda and tone of a gathering, but in Dublin I did see this in evidence. And not only for racialised or marked bodies. This was the year that Ireland had just gone to referendum and 'won' the right to repeal the hitherto automatic citizenship of children born to non-Irish parents on Irish soil. Keynote feminists like Breda Gray vociferously brought such issues to the table. This conference was remarkable for its lack of 'acting out' moments, by marked and unmarked bodies alike, but I think most of the conference participants left with a sense of active, passionate and engaged feminism.

Only Essentialise?:

Having offered these three, fairly untheorised instances of my dance around essentialism, I feel it is time to say goodbye to you, who have been my patient reader so far along the tome. I am tired, and so must you be. In each of these cases, I have taken up an essential position in order to make visible our everyday problematic ways of understanding the world[12]. In the first case, I have taken up a more 'nationalist' Indian position to differentiate it from Mehta's 'diasporic' Indian one, in the second, I have hotfooted around my feminist position in the classroom at the moment that my body becomes marked in a different way, and in the third, I have acted out my dissent in a reactive gesture to other feminist act-outs. Each of these moments of acting out is what Rita Dhamoon calls a necessary politics of disruption that enables us to change the map of meaning-making in a collective feminist space. And yet, throughout the dissertation I have argued against the taking up of a racialised identity just in order to carve out a speaking institutionalised position. I say it again: even as we, marked women, are subject to regimes of looking and assumptions of primitive, fettered backwardness, our task in the theory-book, in the class-room and in the community, remains to stringently refuse the labels. And as we go around the world, a horizontal comradeship of women is possible, but we need to change the very manner in which we conduct our feminist democracies. Till then, the hotfooting around essentialism in the feminist nation continues....

Endnotes

[1] I am indebted to Rita Dhamoon for this lovely phrase from her doctoral work, “Rethinking Culture and Cultural: The Politics of Meaning-Making.” (University of British Columbia, Canada, 2005). Dhamoon also argues for a politics of disruption to challenge accepted and normative hegemonies.

[2] An obvious reference to British novelist, Paul Scott's depiction of the final days and decline of British rule in India: *The Jewel in the Crown* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1966). This quartet was made into a major BBC series in the 1980s and had the paradoxical and only-half ironic effect of producing Raj nostalgia both in Britian and India. Scott fortunately died in 1978 before he could witness this. A little piece of trivia from my collection: Art Malik, the actor who played the central role of Hari Kumar, the British born-and-educated handsome Indian young man who falls in love with Daphne Manners, the inappropriate and forward British girl in India (remember Miss Quested from *A Passage to India*?) in the novel is of course, but of course, accused, tortured and convicted of raping her, is now presented to us as the reader of Shani Mootoo's 1996 *Cereus Blooms at Night* issued by HarperCollinsAudioBooks in 1998.

[3] Sheth and Handa clarify in an endnote that they have printed the term “‘India/n’ in this way to avoid confusion with First Nations people of North America who are frequently referred to as ‘Indian’ in the Canadian lexicon. The slash in the term is used to highlight reference to people from both the country ‘India’ and the diaspora” (*RG* 244)

[4] See Amitav Ghosh's “The Diaspora in Indian Culture.”, Vijay Mishra's “The Diasporic Imaginary” and V S Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), *An Area*

of Darkness (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981), *Beyond Belief: Islamic Expressions Among the Converted Peoples* (1998) and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990).

[5] I use the term Hindu is all its complexity, as a text-based, ideological belief system as well as a 'way-of-life' normative social practice, as a singular religion as well as one intermediated and interleaved with myriad dissenting and reform-minded influences. To quote Steven Vertovec, "It is now widely accepted that 'Hinduism' is a rather spurious category, constructed over the past 150 years or so by Orientalist scholars and Indian leaders alike (see, for instance, W.C. Smith 1964; Frykenberg 1989; Hardy 1990). It follows that descriptions of the nature and breadth of phenomena to which 'Hinduism' refers have been open to interpretation and change among foreign and indigenous subcontinental academics, and among Indian sages, nationalists, and communalists. For members of these latter categories, whose formulations amount to ideologies often having considerable potential for social and political mobilization (witness the Hindu Mahasabha, Rashtriya Swayamseva Sangh, and Vishwa Hindu Parishad), the constructed concepts, meanings, and uses surrounding 'Hinduism' are especially prone to historical and contextual conditioning (Thapar 1989; Freitag 1989; van der Veer n.d.). It is not surprising, then, that within Indian communities outside of India, quite different contextual variables should also offer affect concepts, meanings and uses of the term" (in Peter van der Veer ed. *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,1995. 133).

[6] Both A Sivanandan and M G Vassanji explore the difficulty of employing race as an equalising category in the different sites of East and South Africa. Farida

Karodia and Agnes Sam offer gendered versions of the same equation. All talk about how differently Indians were involved and interpolated in the locational specificities of colonialism in Africa and how each constituency behaved therein. Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* also gestures towards this uneasy relationship between 'non-resident' Indians and 'resident' Blacks in Africa. Contrast this to the different waves in which Indians (as indentured labourers) and Blacks (as slaves) were domiciled in the Caribbean and how this affected their senses of national belonging and ownership. See Aisha Khan and Madhavi Kale's work in Peter van der Veer's *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora* (1995).

[7] Mootoo explores this theme in her novels too: *Cereus Blooms at Night* (Press Gang Publishers, 1996) as well as *He Drown She in the Sea* (McLelland & Stewart, 2005).

[8] Aisha Khan, in an incisive essay, "Homeland, Motherland: Authenticity, Legitimacy, and Ideologies of Place among Muslims in Trinidad" discusses how issues relating to cultural expressions among Muslims of Indian and African descent in the West Indies explore ideas about history, displacement, belonging, and identity" (93). She offers an explanation of how among Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian Muslims, the ownership of the nation is played out in terms of "particular ideologies of [Muslim] identity [that] are shaped and marshalled in struggles over representation, both in the sense of symbolic imaginary and in the sense of political access to material resources" (ibid) with respect to rightful ownership over the tenets and practices of Islam, and as to who had a longer history of access to the faith, compared to recent conversions. This tussle has been played out recently in Muslim congregations in New York after Black and

subcontinental believers tried to forge a coalition to combat the racist fallout of the September 11 events.

[9] See Himani Bannerji's elaboration of the nuanced distinction between popular and official multiculturalism in "Charles Taylor's Politics of Recognition: A Critique." (*The Dark Side of the Nation: Essay on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2000. 125-150). In a completely different context, Len Findlay urges the utter necessity of juxtaposing and reading against each other different narratives of the same issue. In his words, "No Samuel Huntington without Tariq Ali!" (Plenary address, *Not Drowning But Waving* conference, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.)

[10] See Malavika Karlekar's superb photo exhibit *Visualizing Indian Women 1875-1947*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

[11] E. Ann Kaplan's conference paper was invited for publication in 'Feminist Futures: Trauma, the Post-9/11 World and a Fourth Feminism?' *Third Wave Feminism and Women's Studies*, eds. Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford. Special Issue of *Journal of International Women's Studies* 4.2 (2003). <http://www.bridgew.edu/depts/artscnce/jiws/April03>. The keynotes at this conference were Germaine Greer ("Do We Really Need Men?"), Elaine Showalter ("21st century feminism"), E Ann Kaplan ("Feminist Futures") and Susan Stryker ("Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question").

[12] From Dorothy Smith's book title: *The Everyday World as Problematic*.

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